EXPLORING THE "RELATIONAL" LINK
BETWEEN RESPONSIBILITY AND SOCIAL ONTOLOGY:
ETHICAL, ORGANISATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSIONS OF
SHARED AGENCY, COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY,
COLLECTIVE INTENTIONALITY[1]

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, it is not uncommon to observe how, as far as responsibility and responsible practises are concerned, a key determinant is often taken for granted or overlooked: we are referring to the essential requirement that existent "applied" responsible actions in the business/economic sphere - for example, if we think of business organisational contexts: CSR projects, actions, practises and policies - can only exist through the creation of "collective actions", i.e. activities that require *more than* one person for their planning, strategical/operational implementation and reconstitution. The majority of existent initiatives or "applied ethics" fields of research can fall within this description: professional and business ethics activities - encompassing technology, computing, medical, engineering, media, financial issues, ranging from the public interest, the nature of integrity, privacy and confidentiality, intellectual property to whistleblowing and trust.

At the same time, the contemporary mainstream CSR critical discourse (for example Abbarno, 2001; Fooks, Gilmore, Collin, Holden, Lee, 2013; Newell, 2005) - sees "responsible" processes, practises and policies as usually (and mainly) aiming at finding ways to help boards better serve shareholders' interests: this can explain why public opinion is still under the impression that social responsibility rarely goes beyond self-serving and self-congratulatory marketing efforts (e.g. Moratis & Cochius, 2011) or strategic calculations of how investing in CSR can enhance/protect corporate reputation and financial performance (e.g. McWilliams and Siegel 2000). In this context, it is not surprising that - despite the importance acquired in the last 20 years by CSR and responsibility-rela-

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ted issues - an increasing number of organizations has been caught acting irresponsibly (Gallino, 2005; Jones, Boyd, Tench, 2009; Tench, Sun, Jones 2012). It is also often understood that difficulties in effective implementation of responsible actions, especially in developing countries (see for example Abugre 2014), mainly stem from leadership weak spots (often correlated to mismanagement and corruption), lack of commitment and unwillingness to allocate resources.

In other words, if it is true that *ethical* leadership is best understood in the context of virtues *practised in plural communities* (see Robinson 2011), it is equally clear that *organisational* responsibility implies an ethical and plural accountability, and its success is strictly connected with thematic areas like shared agency, collective intentionality, collective responsibility - each of which presents specific challenges.

GOOD OLD-FASHIONED RECURRING DICHOTOMIES?

Traditionally, Western ethical theories and legal codes are based on an idea of "individual responsibility" where *individuals* deliberate, morally evaluate and then decide: this view informs many contemporary CSR practises. On the other side, a "relational turn" - able to place in strong question this monolithic idea of an isolated (and probably alienated) independently responsible individual (see for example McNamee & Gergen 1999) - can serve as a basis for opening new options for co-constructing responsibility as a *relational*, circular, reflexive movement, something closer to social capital and relational goods (Prandini 2011, 2014)

Therefore, it is not useless to remember the "classic" contrast between methodological *individualism* and *methodological* holism (as introduced by Watkins 1952), even though to put it in terms of a black-and-white dualism may appear tendentious (since there are only a few social scientist that would define themselves as *out-and-out* individualist or holist). Indeed, there are many individualism/holism sub-debates in ethics, social sciences, anthropology, philosophy of language, social ontology, etc. (Zahle, 2016), and there are good reasons to believe that the ongoing debate about the nature of responsibility should translate and import these crucial issues on its own terms.

More specifically, we are under the impression that within the current CSR prevailing literature, the individualist argument has more or less obliquely prevailed along with the neo-liberalist ideology: as a matter of fact, the economic imaginary conflates multiple corporate prerogatives into the ownership of shares or executives' agency (Veldman & Willmott, 2013, p. 616).

Hence, it is not surprising to notice - as Seabright and Kurke did (Seabright & Kurke, 1997, pp. 102) - that more than sixty years ago an interdisciplinary scholar like Kenneth Boulding pointed out how "it is not easy to separate clearly the level of the human organism from the next level, that of social organisations" (Boulding, 1956, p. 205). In this regard - e.g. speaking of the "ontological" status of corporations - arguments on both sides have been developed or presented: following Seabright & Kurke (1997, p. 91), we can then identify two broad positions (as explained in Donaldson, 1982). On the one hand, those maintaining a moral status to corporations claim that organisational processes and procedures make it possible for corporations to perform intentional acts that are ascribable to the corporation *as a whole* (see for example French, 1979, 1984); on the other hand, those against assigning moral status to corporations argue that institutionalised, artificial, formal organisations are like machines (i.e. incapable of acting on the basis of moral obligations) and only biological, "tangible" *persons* have to be considered intentional agents capable of forming goals and act accordingly (see for example Ladd, 1970 and Velasquez, 1983). This would mean that - since corporate actions are not "reducible to" but are indeed basically "dependent on" individual actions - collectives are moral agents only in a secondary sense (Werhane, 1985).

Generally speaking, there are a number of different versions of this same simplifying dichotomic approach that places social *collectives* on the one side, and *individual* members on the other: one of the most well-known ones is expressed in the puzzle of the ship of Theseus (presented in Nozick 1981), where the question of "group identity" over time can be addressed *either* by claiming that, holding configuration constant, the *components* of a group determine its identity *or* by maintaining that the *structural spatiotemporal continuity* of a complex object determines its identity, regardless of the replacement of its constituents.

A similar dualism is reflected in organisational theory (see Katz & Kahn, 1978), where a tension is there between a *phenomenologist* approach - maintaining an individualist view that organisations do not have a separate and autonomous ontological (and moral) status - and a *structuralist* approach positing that organisations (as enduring and quite stable "patterns of behaviour") imply a level of analysis that transcends individuals.

If - Aristotelianly speaking - we consider excess and defect as characteristic of vice, and the mean as typical of virtue, we cannot but recall the well-known Margaret Archer's theoretical position (see Archer 2000), where the "excessive" options within the structure/agency debate are formulated in terms of *downward* conflation ("society"/structure dominates people/agents: Durkheim is often cited as an iconic example), *upward* conflation (people are the "orchestrators"/architects of society: Weber's vision is emblematic of this approach), and *central* conflation - the latter blends

structure and agency into unspecified movements of co-constitution, precluding any sociological observation/explanation of their relative influence (Giddens' structurationism is typically mentioned: a criticism of this argument can be found in Piironen, 2014).

As suggested by Magatti (1999), this dualistic debate is only one aspect of a far wider subject matter, i.e. the relationship between *organisation* and its surrounding *context*, which permeates any organisation *from the inside*, through firm's *constitutive elements* (groups and individuals).

An individualist argument, for example, can be refuted because, if rational choice theory becomes prevalent, then responsibility can be mainly seen as something (at the very most) *subsidised* or *incentivized* on an economic basis (Coleman 1985) - since a strategic neo-liberalist approach would be structurally unable to include and compute other aspects of human life. As a consequence, institutions may fruitfully work as *unburdening* devices (see Gehlen 1980) preventing individuals from having to decide each time anew, and the exercise of responsibility would be considered to be *either* too heavy a load *or* a superfluous activity: after all, for those at the bottom of the pyramid, it is more and more impossible to detect those who are liable or imputable, while in turn, for those at the top of the pyramid, it is more and more difficult to take decisions based on a more and more incomplete and ambiguous information. The transformation and inclusion of corporations into increasingly global and complex (less and less accountable) supply chain processes dissolves responsibility into a labyrinth, so that ultimately no one is responsible (again, "imputability" remains a problem, see Robinson, 2009; Ricoeur 1994), and we resign ourselves to the absence of responsibility (or to the presence of irresponsibility, see Tench, Sun, Jones, 2012) in a context a structural disorder. These processes lead to a progressive "habituation"/passive adaptation to dysfunctional institutions, leading to opportunism and annihilation of personality (Gehlen 1980, p. 51). A more managerial and institutionalist stance could see responsibility as an integral part of economic strategy (see for example Ackerman & Bauer 1976): since there is no such thing as an "isolate subject", then the organisation and its environment are deliberately interconnected, integrated and, consequently, coevolving. Hence, in the light of these limitations, "to integrate *social* and environmental concerns in their *business* operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" - this is CSR according to 2001 Green Paper - may seem an unsustainable challenge, or something approachable only by a small number of big "technocratic" players. Put in this terms, responsibility seems to be a paradoxical process of exclusion generated by an inclusive systemic logic, a source of both major systemic failures and local organisational problems.

In other words, does the future of responsibility lie in an economy artificially arranged by impersonal and imposing *institutions* armed with *big data* managed by highly schooled experts at the

World Bank, IMF or other globalized dominant institutions? Surely, we are increasingly surrounded by *institutions* replicating their values, (i.e. a taken-for-granted version of technological, economic and human progress), and the system of science (with its peculiar methods, practises and self-evaluation protocols) - while it appears to be both open/inclusive and specialistic/exclusive - is at risk of becoming a closed and indifferent *techno-science*, functional for the domain of institutional apparatuses, with no room for the exercise of responsibility.

This is a possible reason why an institutional approach to responsibility should not cannibalize the role of those *constitutive elements* (groups and individuals) which act within any organisational context. After all, the "modern" idea of replacing character (and performed acts) with "externally verifiable facts" (to whom rules and algorithms can be applied) is the foundation of the depersonalisation of managerial ethical thinking. Its main presupposition is that man is a "species" regulated by "laws", in which case individual action is only the single occurrence of a general function, and (since true "decisions" would no longer be required) responsibility simply becomes a matter of rule-following. Institutional actions are then "rationally oriented" towards the achievement of aims, ends, objectives or needs, and *per se* tend to exclude any "external" perspective inclusive of the relationship between the *agents* and the *tasks* to be performed: this is why, as Bauman (1989) argues, institutions can be tools that erase responsibility, or can similarly lead to states of "externalised heteronomy" that preclude any internalisation of values (Riesman 1950)

At the same time, ethical or responsibility-related problems are not merely and banally reducible to inter-personal problems in the workplace: rather - since the existence of causal powers is a condition of existence for responsibility (both individual and collective) - how should we re-embed social and environmental concerns into a increasingly "depersonalised" economic/financial agency?

FOUNDATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESPONSIBILITY AND SOCIAL ONTOLOGY: SHARED AGENCY, COLLECTIVE INTENTIONALITY, COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

How can behaviours and actions "interlock" and - more or less effectively - produce articulated "emergent processes of cooperation and cohesiveness"?

A consensus has arisen about the importance of *structuring* processes and *implementation* dynamics for the success of responsible practices, at different level of analysis (see Robinson 2011, p. 268): *micro-level* (where responsible leaders can act as role models in their work with individuals and teams); *meso-level* (where contribution to organizational discussions and policy development is at stake); *macro-level* (where professional bodies engage politically and ensure their voice is heard at national and international/global forums).

As a consequence, in business ethics-focused research multiple level of analysis (and their mutual interrelations) have to be taken into account: Member of the Board of Directors; CEOs; Member of CSR working group; CSR Managers/Coordinators; employees that have the information needed and/or have a strong opinion about CSR organisational performance; employees that do *not* have the information needed and/or do *not* have a strong opinion about CSR organisational performance; external stakeholders.

Therefore, an interest about how groups are *articulated* and how "responsible" processes, projects, policies and strategies are *jointly* negotiated and *relationally* carried out - in a *cooperative* and *constructive* way - remains crucial. The latter core issues can be defined in terms of social ontology: a new *alliance between* empirical research *and* metaphysical and ontological enquiry about the relational/societal aspects within organisational - and within their responsibility-related political, environmental, social, techno-environmental, legal, ethical dimensions (see Morandi, 2006) - is desirable, now more than ever.

From a sociological realist point of view (as analysed in Arrigoni 2018), the way "responsibility" is implemented within any given organisation/corporation is "a form of knowledge through which the members […] produce a self-representation of themselves as whole" (Morandi 2017, p. 28). As we can state about any possible social process and context, each shared representation (e.g. a company code of ethics, or a CSR report) diffuses a self-interpretation *capable of* influencing social practises. This is particularly intriguing if we remember that organisational contexts and practises are neither empirically nor cognitively accessible *outside of* their (symbolic) representations; no member can *perceptually* experience its partaken organisation "as a whole": nonetheless, we can observe that - in each specific empirical relation or responsible practise - there exist a social/organizational dimension, mediated by symbolic representations.

Therefore, a duality (a complementarity?) is there, between: 1) a kind of research that tries to attain CSR objective dimension and attempts to focus on its *structural coordinates;* 2) a different kind of research that takes *subjective dimensions* into account, and seeks to point out how - together

with the objectivity of social phenomena - psychic (social psychology) and anthropological elements concur (Morandi 2017, p. 26).

As for the social realm, then, social ontology can be meant to be concerned with investigating the manner in which social phenomena depend necessarily on human interactions, and therefore can also be concerned with the nature of such existents as social relations, corporations, communities, power, authorities, trust, cooperation, institutions, norms, rules, custom, convention, collective practice. As a consequence, what kind of *moral* and *ontological meaning* is implied in shared agency, collective intentionality and collective responsibility, all of which are necessary dynamics for responsibility to be *effective* and *real*? Are we dealing with emergent social entities or just with institutional facts (see for example Lawson, 2016)?

We have very good reasons to believe that the inclusion of social ontology into the vexing dilemma about delineating the boundary between individual (ethical) and collective (organisational) responsibility can surely enrich this longstanding debate. As abstract as it may sound, the operational implementation and *reconstitution* of responsible practices has a lot to do, when economic processes are at stake, with the ontological and symbolical analysis and representation of the dynamic corporation form.

If we think of the firm as an emergent reality, as a cohesive irreducible whole made of human and non-human components which is (and needs to be) *dynamically reconstituted* (as for example suggested in Chassagnon, 2014, p. 199, but also in Demaria, 1982 from a totally different "metaphysical" point of view), all of the above prominent areas of activity maintain a cohesive continuity, and responsible policies and behaviours endure through specific "articulated" dynamics. The notion of "articulation" (whose metaphysical-sociological implications have been defined and analysed in Morandi, 2017, while the notion itself was introduced by Eric Voegelin, 1987) essentially and primarily denotes an emergent property of empirical relations: "this process in which human beings form themselves into a society for action [can] be called the articulation of a society" (Voegelin, 1987, p. 37). The latter notion can entail a possible ramification towards political science - which however remains relevant for CSR studies - but, even more importantly, we underline that "articulation" denotes an actualisation, something that brings into being ability and possibility of a common-action, i.e. a community. Chassagnon (2014, p.199) describes this possibility in terms of "emergent processes of cooperation and cohesiveness": more specifically, organisation of responsibility (and responsible organisations) are based on an *ability to act for a common goal* and on the *cohesiveness* that is created to achieve this goal.

As anticipated above, a possible way of implementing these important subjects of inquiry in order to bridge some existing gaps in CSR/Business Ethics studies - is to start focusing on three interrelated and adjoining notions: shared agency, collective intentionality and collective responsibility.

Shared agency

There is no doubt that all of the above complex strategic areas can be adequately addressed only if responsible organisational actions are the effective product of a *unified* exercise of agency, whose realisation or delusion "can be of interest for a variety of disciplines, including politics, social science, economics, ethics, law, (social) epistemology and organisational psychology" (Roth, 2016, p.1). If we want to explore the implication of "acting together" for relevant empirical research and its results, we have to ask ourselves if "shared agency" could be understood under the theoretical frameworks available to us from the study of individual agency. For example, a way of trying and distinguishing individuals' actions that *together* constitute shared activity from those that form a mere *aggregation* of individual acts can be a matter of intention, more precisely of "we-intentions" (see Tuomela & Miller, 1985, for a first elaboration of this notion), i.e. of attitudes had by whatever entity is denoted (or can be denoted) by a "we". From this point of view, while it is *not* obvious that, as a constituent of a supra-individual entity (e.g. as an employee working for a multinational corporation), I am necessarily committed to what the corporation is up to, nonetheless there is a sense in which I am committed to what *we* are doing (basically, my job/our jobs).

A pivotal notion about the nature of shared agency is the concept of "participatory intention", which accounts for each individual's participatory commitment to a collective activity: Tuomela and Miller (1988) defend a reductionist approach that understands we-intentions in term of individual intentions, such that I can have a participatory intention in a project if *I* intend to do my part in it, if *I* feel that the project makes sense and can be successful and if *I* think that a similar belief is mutually held and shared by the other members of the group; on the other hand Searle (1990) contends that such a reductive approach does not *per se* entail the essential *cooperation*, *co-extensiveness* and *agreement*, without which no genuine shared activity is possible. Bratman (1992) maintains a halfway position definable in terms of practical intersubjectivity, where *individual intentions* taking the form "I intend that we do this" are the basic components (thus apparently positioning closer to a reductionist approach), but where also meshing of sub-plans (and *intentions to* mesh sub-plans) are equally necessary. How participatory intentions are implemented and negotiated in each and every organisational context is a very meaningful point of observation for responsible practises.

Roth (2016, pp. 16-18) also outlines an additional element supporting the idea that some group can be really subjects of shared agency, displaying group intentional attitude: for example, List and Pettit (2002) - as they examine judgment aggregation and its properties - show that significant variations emerge *between* group decisions taken on the basis of "majority votes" on each individual member's global preferences *and* group decisions made adopting a premise-driven procedure where group's views regarding each premise (i.e. decision component) are considered. These divergent outcomes can suggest that groups or organisations may be considered genuine intentional subjects, and this claim can be relevant for the development of empirical research as well.

Collective Responsibility

Does collective responsibility have to do with moral blameworthiness? Or does it have to do with merely causal *connections* between *intentions* - conceived as internal "mental states" - and *actions/outcomes* - in the form of "ostensible effects" in the external world? Is group morality ascribed to discrete individuals and/or morally located in the individual moral free will? Or is the *source* of moral responsibility attributed to groups - and the actions considered are collective actions taken by groups *qua* collectives?

Smiley (2011) explains that the very possibility and coherence of "collective responsibility" as an intellectual construct has been challenged by methodological or normative *individualists* (see again Watkins, 1952): at the core of individualist argument, there is a generalised scepticism about the existence of genuinely collective actions because *firstly*, unlike individuals, groups cannot form intentions (and therefore cannot be understood to act as a group) and, *secondly*, because groups cannot be kept responsible as morally blameworthy in a strong sense, since this could violate the ethical and legal principles of both individual responsibility and fairness (as suggested for example in Sverdlik, 1987). It is not difficult to see how the classical Max Weber's claim (Weber, 1922, p. 15) is echoed here: namely, that social phenomena must be explained by referring to individual actions, which in turn must be analysed by addressing the intentional states motivating the individual actors.

Recently, as Smiley (2011) analyses in detail, a new attention has been given to the advantages and disadvantages of holding particular kinds of groups morally responsible in practice, and the main coordinates of this debate can also be interestingly drawn into CSR studies, both from a theoretical and practical point of view. Overall, the main underlying issues can be summarized as follows: a) whether or not collective responsibility makes morally sense, making it possible for groups

to be distinctively blameworthy or guilty; b) how can collective responsibility be distributed across individual members; c) how collectively ascribed responsibility potentially clash with social justice, and how collective responsibility can be operationally productive and fair.

In brief, we can observe how contemporary *critics* of collective responsibility rely on two assumptions: a) that actions - as distinguishable from mere behaviours - are based on *intentions*; b) in order to be held responsible of anything, a specific "bad intention" is required. Since collectives do not have "mental lives" or hold beliefs in an intentional way, a number of authors - including for example Lewis (1948) or more recently Narveson (2002) - can try and demonstrate that actions and moral agency can be exclusively associated with individuals.

On the other hand, *defenders* of collective responsibility rely on multiple philosophical and practical arguments to justify the possibility of collective responsibility. Among the many theoretical streams that could be potentially included and mentioned, we can outline the following:

a) very simply, "blaming attitudes are held towards collective as well as individuals" (Cooper, 1968, p. 258), and quite often we refer our emotional states - like indignation, resentment, approval - to groups, or we can experience something similar - shame or pride, for instance - as group members (see Tollefsen, 2006);

b) even though not all kind of groups are necessarily capable of acting and behaving collectively - since for example the aforementioned "emergent processes of cooperation and cohesiveness" (Chassagnon, 2014, p.199) are not always there (see the difference between *aggregate* and *conglomerate* collectives, French, 1984, p. 5) - some practical criteria used for distinguishing where collective responsibility is ascribable have been listed (*ibidem*):

(1) some group actions have an identifiable moral agent (e.g. a representative body, a board, etc.), and a set of self-consciously decision are made on a rational and shared basis; this happens particularly where courses of actions can be chosen by consolidated organisational mechanisms, such as standard of conduct enabling to identify group discipline, group *ethos* and a configuration of defined roles by which organisational powers are exercised;

(2) paradigmatically, collective responsibility can be ascribed where group members share common needs or take strong interest in in each other's interests, since they are more likely to jointly pursue projects and solidarity dynamics (e.g. strong identification, proud exhibition of collective consciousness, etc.)

(3) shared attitudes can make the group itself eligible for collective responsibility;

a) *collective intentionality* may be the key to understand when and whether group meet the same conditions of moral responsibility that individuals do, as if a sort of truly plural subject could be

considered when more subjects combine in such a way as to make one subject: in this respect, while group intentions can barely or very unlikely sustained by the notion of "collective mind" (Sosa, 2009), the concepts of plural "joint commitments" (Gilbert, 2000; Bratman 1993, 2006) or - even more, as seen above - of "we-intentions" (Tuomela, 2005, 2006) that supervene on individual intentional agency allow us to talk about how collective group-based intentions, belief, desires, projects can be taken into account.

Collective intentionality

If we think at responsible practises, projects and actions as instances of "joint actions" carried out by group agents such as business enterprises, the notion of "collective intentionality" is absolutely central. Collective intentional attitudes are like relevant indexes that play a decisive role in the constitution of social actions, and are of great interest for philosophers of actions, cultural anthropologists, social scientists: similarly, they could be of great interest for those streams of research aiming at understanding how, why and to what extent participants into responsible actions need to have at least a vague general idea of the enterprise as a whole, and a more structured idea of their allotted part in it (see Collingwood's definition of "society" in Collingwood, 1947, p. 146). Generally speaking, a special attention needs to be placed to the specific modes in which this collective intentionality is constituted, and namely: *collective acceptance* as a precondition for the creation and sharing of a common institutional language; *shared intentions* as a way of coordinating their actions in a cooperative way; *joint attention,* as it makes it possible to experience a given organisational reality as an available common ground for multiple agents. How to translate all these "modes of collective intentionality" into measurable or at least investigable indexes for empirical research? This surely represents a future challenge for CSR studies.

Nonetheless, a "central problem" about collective intentionality - put forward in terms of a crucial contradiction by Schweikard and Schmid (2013) - lies in the difficult composition of the two following usually accepted statements. The first is the so-called Irreducibility Claim, affirming that collective intentionality is not reducible to a mere summation, aggregation or distributive pattern of individual intentionalities. This position maintains a substantial difference *between* aggregates/ summations of individual intentions (even if combined with common knowledge and shared beliefs) *and* genuine collective intentions, which on the one hand are *collectively* and not *distributively* ascribable, but on the other hand do not displace participating individuals as the bearers of individual intentions: in spite of that, this idea clashes with the second viewpoint that intentional status of

individuals are really their own. The second statement at stake is instead the so-called Individual Ownership Claim, according to which collective intentionality is owned by individuals, and then any intentionality an individual displays is his/her own only because each individual displays a sort of intentional autonomy: this position conflicts with the idea that individual minds are by some means fused when collective intentionality are at issue.

This apparently unsolvable contradiction seems to bring us back to the aforementioned dichotomy between individualist and collectivist stances. A possibility to escape this dualistic impasse lies in the possibility of recalling the dialectic interplay between structure and agency in terms of an *analytical dualism*, as proposed by Margaret Archer (see for example, 2000). While recognizing that structure and agency are interdependent (i.e. without people there would be no "structures", and therefore no responsible practices/projects/protocols/strategies), Archer argues that it is possible to draw a distinction between them analytically, since the two operate on different timescales: this means that *antecedently existing structures* "constrain" and "enable" agents, whose actions and interactions can lead to structural elaboration and potential reproduction or transformation of the initial structure. The *resulting* structure then provides a similar context of action for *future agents,* in the same way as the *initial antecedently existing* structure was itself the *outcome* of structural elaboration resulting from the action of prior agents: more specifically, Archer talks about a "morphogenetic sequence in which structure condition agency and agency, in turn, elaborates upon the structure which it confronts" (Archer, 2000, p. 306).

We must here recall the "conditions of responsibility" as outlined by Hans Jonas in his classical *The Imperative of Responsibility*: "The first and most general condition of responsibility is *causal power*, that is, that acting makes an *impact* on the world; the second, that such acting is under the agent's *control*; and the third, that he can foresee its *consequences* to some extent." (Jonas 1984, p. 90). However, what do we mean by the term "causal power", and by the connected notion of "formal causation"?

The notion of *formal causation* (Lawson, 2016, p. 363; 2015, p. 3) can be fruitfully employed in this context, to denote those arrangements/organisations of the parts that enable organisational emergent powers and efficient causation. Basically, any emergent totality, *qua* an organised entity, is irreducible to the mere aggregation of its components, precisely because the way the components are arranged or relationally organised endows the *totality* with some causal emergent powers which are not predictable from those of the *elements* when considered apart of their eventual mutual positioning within the totality. We can imagine some bricks when arranged randomly or when making up a house, or the articulated social positioning and the relevant collective practises in a community.

When CSR projects are on the table, for example, the roles of such formal causation (i.e. organisational arrangements) provides us with a criterion that makes us able to assess whether and how real organisational causal powers can be evaluated, explored, implemented, optimized, adopted.

Morandi (2011) goes further and intelligently suggests to go back over Aristotle and his traditional theory of the four causes (namely: material, efficient, formal, final), and to show its appropriateness for sociological issues, and for CSR empirical analysis more specifically. Namely, *formal* and *final* causality are linked to the dialectic morphogenetic/morphostatic dynamics between structure and agency: while "form" is an ordering principle that makes the totality of parts different from the simple sum of the parts, the passage (i.e. organisational change) from one form to another implies the introduction of a "new order" between the parts composing the whole - an order that will give rise to a new stability/unity between them. Then, structural causal (formal) powers initially originate from the aims intentionally shared by their creators: however, and thereafter, the formal causality of structures becomes a property that *no longer* belongs to their co-creators, but belongs to the *order* elaborated by them. Conversely, *aims* are the completion the processes tend to, i.e. the attainment of a new stability/form - of the elements composing the whole. Agents have finalistic causal powers, and aims - since they are desired - do not only give rise to structures, but underlie the capacity to *move from* existing social forms/structures. Once conceived, aims do not yet have a social valence/causal powers, but they acquire them once they become the driving force of agency: in other words, they become capable of exerting causal power only if they can translate themselves into an action that has a structural causal influence (i.e. is capable of changing or stabilizing existing structures).

A slightly different (but equally important) contribution coming from a critical realist perspective is Tony Lawson's view about social emergence, that we briefly recall in this context because is convergent with our argument that CSR studies should embrace a social ontology-focused perspective. According to his view (see for example Lawson, 2015), morphogenesis denotes those process where the social emergence of novel totalities occurs: *community* is the most general or common form of such totalities, and firms (and their component groups) are fundamentally communities with specific emergent organising structures (and relevant processes, cfr. Demaria's account of dynamic transcendentals below).

Similarly, we can notice that the term "community" - when not properly elaborated - can lead to vague descriptions of it, as an "organisational form" identifiable by some kind of geographical, technological, functional delimiting factor: on the contrary, we think that a morphogenetic approach - isolating structural and/or cultural factors which provide a context of action for agents - makes it

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possible to investigate how those elements shape the subsequent interactions of agents and how those interactions in turn reproduce or transform the initial context.

FINAL REMARKS ABOUT RESPONSIBILITY:
FROM THE "SUPPOSITION" TO THE "CONSTRUCTION" OF SOCIETY

Tiziana Andina (2016) has recently reformulated the state of play in terms of a distinction between P-ontologies, I-ontologies, and O-ontologies, which are seen as different starting points on the basis of which to develop an explanation of social reality. P-ontologies focus on the concept of Person (or agent) as well as on the relationships between people, and can be traced back to an Aristotelian approach to the problem: a paradigmatic representative of this position is for example Margaret Gilbert, according to which group intentions exist when more persons *constitute* the plural subject of an intention, or when they are *jointly committed to intending as a body* to do something (see for example Gilbert, 2000). On the other side, I-ontologies regard Institutions, rules and language as the center of social reality: for instance this position is exemplified by the position of John Searle, whose conception puts "institutional facts" rather than emergent social entities at the center of social ontology (see Lawson, 2016; Searle 1995, 2006). The third group - O-ontologies - concentrates on the role and function of social objects, such as documents (see for example Ferraris 2007).

We cannot help but recalling Ricoeur's definition of ethics as "a good life, with and for others, within just institutions" (Ricoeur, 1992), according to which human beings certainly share practical reason and practical humanity, but "just institutions" are those which allow their full expression. That adjective - "just" - posits a huge difference with all the "institutional" disabling, paradoxical and counter-productive perspectives analysed above: actually, we may argue (with and beyond Illich) that in institutionalised contexts responsibility does not disappear, but re-emerges in different ways.

To sum up, then, all the aforementioned issues converge on a final question: can this kind of debate be meaningful both for advancing the current theories/models and/or remedying failures in practice? Lawson (2015, p. 8) raises a similar question when he states that - provided that firms are a form a community - it is important to understand what forms they take and what processes *constitute* a community into a firm type (or a group, or a strategic panel, or a steering committee, or anything similar). Is it sufficient that the members *declare* themselves to be and/or constitute such a whole/a unity/a group/an organisation? What are the underlying positioning/structuring strategies and processes?

At the same time, a certain dynamic tension between *organisational* ethical values and *personal* qualities remains when ethical leadership and CSR programmes are at issue: for example, as far as an ethical framework for public sector is concerned (see EUPAN, 2004), some core ethical leadership *organisational values* are invoked: the Principle of the rule of law, Impartiality/Objectivity, Reliability/Confidence/Trust, Transparency/Openness, Duty of care, Courtesy/Willingness to help in a respectful manner ('service principle'), Professionalism/Expertise, Accountability.

These organisational values are in turn understood to generate some kind of *organisational standards of conduct,* which act as a cultural model for collective *ethos.* The aforementioned EUPAN ethical framework, for example, lists the following: Handling of confidential information, Acceptance of gifts or favours, Regulations on outside activity (e.g. reporting second jobs or asking for permission), Regulations on financial interests (e.g. declaration of financial interests), Post-employment restrictions, Use of public resources (e.g. phone, internet, email), Avoiding conflict of interest in purchasing and contracting (e.g. procurement rules, separation of responsibilities), Tendering regulations on purchases.

Then, specific policies for the *implementation*, *promotion* and *stimulation* of these values and standard of conduct become necessary: namely, Recruitment, Training, Mobility, Communication and Leadership must take into account such values and standard. All this means that, somehow, after structuring ethical leadership as a part of group morality (values and standards of conduct), an enduring and continuous effort to implement collective responsibility is required.

Tommaso Demaria (1982) has tried and identified, from a theoretical and metaphysical point of view, a solution to this problem (probably without being sufficiently aware that… true problems do not have a "solution" but a history!): here-actualised a classical philosophical *topos*, i.e. the doctrine of *transcendentals* (i.e those properties co-extensive with being). Basically, Demaria identified some *dynamic transcendentals* (i.e. properties of a company/organisation as a being or, in other words, as a "dynamic entity constantly under construction"), as qualities that pertain to any group/ totality/collectives: if a collective lacks such qualities, it is not really "articulated" and is only an *ersatz* unity, with no real formal/causal emergent powers (bound to fail as a responsible player). Properly elaborated, these transcendentals can be considered as indexes that will help outlining those *structuring* intra- and inter-enterprise *processes* which lead to the best results (in terms of social capital and relational goods growth) for the actors involved (individuals, families, firms, business networks, economic districts).

The basic *dynamic transcendentals* are:

- *educativity/educationality*: whether and to what extent members are *prepared and educated to act* according to responsibility-oriented practises;

- *morality*: whether and to what extent intra- and inter-enterprise *procedures, rules and aspects ease and encourage* socially responsible practises;

- *sociality*: whether and to what extent a responsibility-oriented *culture can ease, encourage and enhance the cohabitation/coexistence* of the different actors involved;

- *missionarity*: whether and to what extent responsibility-oriented *practises impact, spread out and propagate* in the different settings

This framework is not an all-encompassing solution, but gives some important pointers about how the notion of "responsibility" can be reappraised within a social ontology-focused context: this is like saying that the existence of a organised social reality must *neither* be taken for granted, *nor* presupposed as the domain/origin of responsibility, since responsibility - instead of *assuming* the existence of society - is a way to *build* it. From this of way, *relational* and *organisational virtues* constitute the practice of resistance to systemic disintegration: it is not surprising then Lawson argues that the relations of rights and obligations that underly all social "organisational forms" rest on the "the exercise of human capacities of trusting and being trustworthy, so that trust and trustworthiness are necessarily all pervasive and basic" (2015, p.7).

If we accept that responsibility requires any action to be under the individual/collective agent's control, and to enact and implement a degree of causal power, we must remember - together with Hannah Arendt (definitely, an overshadowed voice in the debate about responsibility, see the classical 1958) - that action would not be possible without two fundamental human faculties: *promising* and *forgiveness*. The former undoes the hold of the future on the present by pacifying its *unpredictability*, while the latter loosens the grip of the past by alleviating its *irreversibility*: nonetheless - and paradoxically - as wittingly remembered in Hirsch 2012, the power of forgiveness stems from its unpredictability, and unpredictability is precisely that which promising is meant to prevent.

One possible trajectory to follow - if we want to "embrace" this diquieting paradox -is the one offered by John Dewey, one of the founders of American pragmatist tradition: he used to say that etymology and study of everyday language - even though not sufficient in order to solve analytical problems - can provide some interesting insight about the notions we use, and can make us aware of how language constraints our thinking or how dichotomies/logical semantic articulation can become incorporated in our analysis (Dewey 1939, pp. 5-6).

Now, if we carry out an etymologically exploration of *responsibility,* not only we find out that it comes from Latin *respondere* ("respond, answer to, promise in return"), which is composed by *re-* ("back") and *spondere* ("to bind oneself, promise solemnly, to pledge"), and eventually trace back to an hypothetical Proto-Indo-European root **spend-* ("to make an offering, perform a rite"). An additional etymological link with *spondee* - coming from Latin *spondeus*, and before from Greek *spondeios (pous)* - connects the notion of responsibility with the name of the meter originally used in chants accompanying libations, from *sponde* ("solemn libation, a drink-offering"), and is related to *spendein* "make a drink offering", eventually tracing back to the same Proto-Indo-European root **spend-*. It is revealing that the past participle of *spondere* (*sponsus/sponsa*)*,* means "bridegroom/ bride", or more literally "betrothed": this means that, like promising (and like marriage…), responsibility is a challenge that continuously renews itself, and cannot be easily discharged (and "complied with") once and for all.

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