



What Mutual Assistance Is, and What It Could Be in the Contemporary World

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Received: 22 October 2020 / Accepted: 29 August 2021 / Published online: 3 September 2021
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Abstract

This paper explores the implications of a Civil Economy approach to consumer ethics, by addressing the idea that Antonio Genovesi's (1713–1769) notion of *mutual assistance* can be understood in terms of *collective intentionality* or *team reasoning*. I try to give reasons for this idea by a careful examination of Genovesi's conception of social life and human agency and by reading it through the lens of team reasoning. I argue that this understanding of mutual assistance may imply broad constraints over agents' choices whenever they conflict with the good of society. Then I explore the implications of a mutual assistance approach to market ethics in a global society, where conflicting views of good and different group affiliations are possible.

Keywords Civil economy · Team reasoning · Collective intentionality · Consumer ethics

There is universal recognition of the importance of markets as tools to connect peoples and to let them engage in a system of voluntary exchanges. However, new global challenges have questioned the ability of markets to pursue the interests of all social groups, including future generations. This is particularly true when we are faced with environmental emergencies, which have been aggravated by increasing inequalities and national states' lack of regulatory power over global corporations. Such crises have led, in the field of economics, to growing concerns about inequalities, social tensions and environmental sustainability in the era of globalisation (Atkinson, 2015; Sachs, 2020; Stiglitz, 2016). On the philosophical side, moral critics of the markets have questioned the effects of the markets on cultures, preferences, identities, human capacities and social relationships (Satz, 2010) and have expressed their concerns about a market approach to environmental policy (Sandel, 2012). In contrast, defenders of the markets stress its ability to spread trust and promote valuable goods (Brennan & Jaworski, 2015; Greene, 2019; Sugden, 2018). In a slightly different way, some ethical approaches to markets advocate economic transactions as forms of civic engagement and tools of socio-institutional

change, particularly in directing consumers and investors towards 'ethical' and 'responsible' choices in the absence of a regulatory framework (Becchetti, 2012; Becchetti & Costantino, 2010; Becchetti & Huybrechts, 2008; Becchetti et al., 2011; Moore, 2004; Nicholls, 2010).

In this paper, I address this approach to markets from the perspective of the civil economy (CE) tradition. The CE is an economic approach rooted in the Italian Enlightenment tradition, particularly in the thought of Antonio Genovesi (1713–1769) and further developed by the Italian economists Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni (Bruni, 2006; Bruni & Zamagni, 2007; Zamagni, 2008). This approach has given rise to a promising strand of studies in the fields of economic philosophy (Bruni & Sugden, 2008, 2013), history of economic thought (Zamagni, 2010; Bruni & Zamagni, 2016; Bruni, 2018a; Bruni, 2018b; Bruni & Santori, 2018; Dal Degan, 2018; Pabst, 2018; Porta, 2018; Pabst & Scazzieri, 2019; Santori, 2020) and business ethics (Martino, 2020; Sferrazzo, 2019; Zamagni, 2020). Martino (2020) particularly stresses the potentialities of CE ethics to foster trust in the absence of a regulatory framework, given the importance that CE assigns to virtue-based behaviour.

My starting point is Bruni and Sugden's (2008) idea of *fraternity* in market relationships. According to the authors, *it is possible* to perceive market transactions as 'fraternal' to the extent that a market relationship is conceived as *a joint endeavour aiming to benefit both parties involved*. If they perceive their action in this way, agents may take on

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reciprocal responsibilities that go beyond the letter of the contract. Historically, this view is ascribed to Antonio Genovesi's (2008, 2013) idea of *mutual assistance*, as opposed to Adam Smith's (1723–1790) *mutual benefit* (Smith, 1776). In modern terms, mutual assistance is represented as *collective intentionality* or *team reasoning* (Gold & Sugden, 2007; Sugden, 1993, 2000, 2009). When exploring the implications of this idea, the authors (Bruni & Sugden, 2008) mainly focus on the market of care and the avoidance of opportunism. My paper tries to go one step further, asking if a mutual assistance approach could be applied to larger markets and global production chains involving multiple actors belonging to different social groups. To answer this question, I further inquire on the relationship between Genovesi's mutual assistance and team reasoning. More precisely, I expound on Genovesi's (2008, 2013) historical view of mutual assistance, and try to read it through the lenses of team reasoning, i.e. by borrowing conceptual tools from the related literature (Anderson, 1993; Hollis, 1998; Nelson, 2009; Sugden, 2002) in order to show how they help us in understanding Genovesi's conception of social relationships and individual responsibility. I highlight that the endorsement of mutual assistance as a recommendation of market ethics may imply very broad constraints on agents' behaviour, helping us to understand the contemporary push towards responsible market choices, including responsible consumption, fair trade, and ethical finance. However, the nature and extent of those constraints may crucially depend on one issue, related to the affective dimensions of team reasoning, that is group identification (Colman & Gold, 2018) or personal identity (Anderson, 2001).

Preliminarily, let me offer some methodological clarifications. When referring to team reasoning, Sugden will be my main author of reference, and I will be particularly concerned with his contributions of 2009, 2011 and 2015, in which he defends team reasoning as a descriptive tool that can be applied to market behaviour. However, I will not consider Sugden's (2018) last formulation of team reasoning, nor the normative recommendations that he adopts, based on this formulation.¹ Moreover, a question in Sugden's theory remains unanswered: when is it rational to endorse team reasoning (Nalli, 2021)? A suggestion in this direction—what I refer to as 'emotional team reasoning'—is given in 2002 and restated in 2018, but not further developed. In my argument, I will take on this suggestion, but I will also look for different hints, in particular from Hollis (1998) and Anderson (2001).

¹ In his book of 2018, Sugden explicitly addresses a liberal conception of society, whose historical roots may be quite distant from Genovesi's theological and philosophical background. A further inquiry in this direction goes beyond the scope of this paper.

| | | | |
|----------|-------|----------|-------|
| | | Player 2 | |
| | | left | right |
| Player 1 | left | 2, 2 | 0, 0 |
| | right | 0, 0 | 1, 1 |

Fig. 1 The Hi-Lo game

I have structured this paper as follows. In the first and the second sections, I review the literature on team reasoning and on Genovesi, respectively. In the third and the fourth sections, I examine Genovesi's view of the human being and social life to expound on why mutual assistance can be understood as a form of team reasoning. In the fifth section, I define mutual assistance and try to analyse its practical implications for consumer behaviour. I draw the conclusions in the sixth section.

What is Team Reasoning?

Theories of team reasoning were first formulated in the field of philosophy by Hodgson (1967) and Regan (1980), and then developed by Gilbert (1989), Hurley (1989), Searle (1990), Bratman (1993), Tuomela (1995) and Hollis (1998). In economics, different accounts of team reasoning have been developed by Sugden (1993, 2000, 2015) and Bacharach (1999, 2006). The basic idea of team reasoning is that, in relation to a specific decision problem, agents may conceive of themselves not as isolated individuals, but as *members of a team*, each performing their part in a collective action. In other words, theories of team reasoning attribute agency to groups, allowing questions such as 'What should we do?' rather than 'What should I do?'. In so doing, the agent "performs her part of a *profile* of actions which, if acted on by all members, promotes the relevant objective of the team" (Bruni & Sugden, 2008, p. 49). In what follows, I will argue that team reasoning has both a descriptive and a moral relevance.

One of the most common economic application of team reasoning is the Hi-Lo (Bacharach & Stahl, 2000) and Prisoner's Dilemma game (for a comprehensive review of games relevant to team reasoning, see Colman & Gold, 2018; Gold & Colman, 2020). Figure 1 shows a Hi-Lo game. Let the game be defined by a set of players, $i = 1, 2$, and let $s_i = (s_1, s_2)$ be the set of available strategies for each player. Let $u_i(s_i, s_{-i})$ represent the payoff of player i when the strategy profile (s_i, s_{-i}) is chosen. Also let the four possible values of $u_i(s_i, s_{-i})$, corresponding to the four possible strategy profiles of the game, be as depicted in Fig. 1. It is easy to show that the game has two pure strategy Nash Equilibria (*left, left*) and (*right, right*) (to keep the discussion simple, I will not consider mixed strategies). Conventional

| | | Player 2 | |
|----------|-------|----------|-------|
| | | left | right |
| Player 1 | left | 1, 1 | 10, 0 |
| | right | 0, 10 | 8, 8 |

Fig. 2 The prisoner’s dilemma game

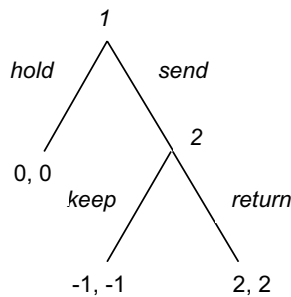


Fig. 3 The market game (Sugden, 2018)

game theory provides no criterion to select one of the two, although *(left, left)* is Pareto-optimal. Figure 2 shows the prisoner’s dilemma game. Here the strategy profile *(right, right)* is Pareto-optimal, but as known, the strategy profile *(left, left)* is the sole Nash Equilibrium.

Both experimental evidence and common experience show that real people are somehow able to converge towards a Pareto-optimal outcome (Axelrod, 1984; Rapoport et al., 1965; Selten & Stoecker, 1986); however, conventional game theory is unable to capture this mechanism. Team reasoning has been advocated as a possible explanation for these puzzles: when applied to Hi-Lo and the prisoner’s dilemma, team reasoning prescribes the strategy profile that is the *best result for the team* (Sugden, 1993).

Basically, team reasoning solves the puzzles by changing the assumptions about the agents’ points of view. As such, it is a descriptive model; it is an abstraction, a formalisation that represents the forms of reasoning that people often use in many real-world situations, perhaps informally or even unconsciously (Sugden, 2000). In his latest version of the theory, Sugden (2015, 2018) suggests that team reasoning can be at work in the market domain as well. To understand this point, consider the two games represented in Figs. 3 and 4 (Sugden, 2018).

Let the games be defined by a set of players, $i = 1, 2$, and let $s_i = (s_1, s_2)$ be the set of available strategies for each player. Let $u_i(s_i, s_{-i})$ represent the payoff of player i when the strategy profile (s_i, s_{-i}) is chosen. Each node is an information set for a player’s move. Player 1 moves first, choosing between *(hold)* and *(send)*. If he/she chooses *(hold)*, the game ends with payoff $u_1(hold, \cdot) = u_2(hold, \cdot) = 0$. Next, it is Player 2’s turn to choose between *(keep)* and *(return)*.

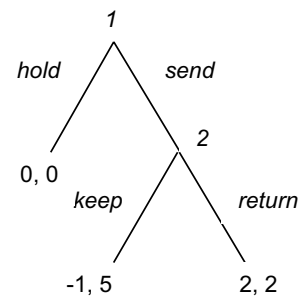


Fig. 4 The trust game (Sugden, 2018)

Both games end at this node, with the payoffs shown in Fig. 1 (market game) and 4 (trust game). The market game represents what occurs in an ordinary market transaction, whereas the trust game may represent transactions characterised by the possibility of deception, informality, lack of regulation and limited enforceability. The outcomes predicted by conventional game theory are *(send, return)* and *(hold, keep)*, respectively, as subgame perfect equilibria. However, similar to the prisoner’s dilemma and the Hi-Lo games, empirical evidence shows that this may not be the case in real interactions, since a substantial percentage of subjects also chooses *(send, return)* in the trust game. Team reasoning is a possible explanation for this evidence because by reasoning as participants of a joint endeavour, the two players seek the result that is *best for both* with respect to a benchmark of non-cooperation (Sugden, 2009, 2011, 2015).

The key point of Sugden’s argument is that the same reasoning scheme may be at work in the market game as well. The real difference between the two games is that team reasoning and standard game theory prescribe the same strategy profile in the market game, while this is not the case in the trust game. This makes it impossible to make inferences about the reasoning scheme that players have adopted when acting in a market game. However, if team reasoning *can* be at work in the trust game, it *can* also be at work in the market game (although it is not always the case).²

² Attempting to provide a more general definition of team reasoning, Sugden (2011, 2015, 2018) seems to suggest that a form of team reasoning may be at work whenever coordination with others’ actions may attain a ‘more satisfying’ outcome with respect to non-coordination. More precisely, the author suggests that a scheme of team reasoning is at work whenever one agent conforms to an existing regularity of behaviour (‘practice’). Indeed, conformity may be understood as a form of social cooperation to attain a result that is collectively more efficient with respect to non-conformity. Driving norms at crossroads are typical examples of convention. Whatever the convention is (e.g. giving precedence to drivers on the right rather than those on the left), conformity is needed to avoid accidents and hence is better than non-conformity.

This argument highlights the *descriptive* relevance of team reasoning. It represents market behaviour in a way that is coherent with many agents' actual behaviour in more obviously pro-social situations (Bruni & Sugden, 2008; Sugden, 2009, 2011, 2015). The *moral* relevance of team reasoning is that it captures the agents' *perceptions* of not only the problem but also of *their roles with respect to each other*, including the *affective tone* and the *moral significance* that are attributed to market relationships (Bruni & Sugden, 2008). If a market transaction can be understood as a form of team reasoning, then it is not an expression of pure self-interest. It is also not an expression of altruism in a self-sacrificing sense, but of a *shared intention* for the consequences of the transaction, in which the agents look at each other as *partners in a joint endeavour* (Bruni & Sugden, 2008; Sugden, 2009, 2011). It is worth noting that from this perspective, team reasoning can provide not only a representation of many people's *actual perception* of the moral status of their action on the market, but it can also provide the basis for a *normative recommendation* for market ethics.

Normative accounts of team reasoning have been proposed in philosophy and economics as well (Gold & Sugden, 2007). For example, Regan's (1980) 'cooperative utilitarianism' may be interpreted as a form of team reasoning, recommended to rational and moral agents. Moral arguments in favour of collective agency have also been presented by Hurley (1989) and Anderson (2001).

As argued by Colman and Gold (2018), it is difficult to deny that real people often engage in some form of team reasoning—in households, at the workplace and in civic engagement. Nevertheless, an open question in theories of team reasoning concerns the problem of 'group identification' (Gold & Sugden, 2007), also known as 'the existence problem' (Sugden, 2000). In a nutshell, a team exists to the extent that a set of individuals recognise themselves as its members, conceiving it "as a single unit of agency, acting as a single entity in pursuit of some single objective" (Gold & Sugden, 2007, p. 125). The question then is: why do some teams come to existence by virtue of group identification, and others do not? Or, stated differently, what group do individuals identify with? (Gold, 2018).

Proponents of team reasoning maintain that a complete answer to this question is impossible, both in philosophy and in economics. Theorists of rational choice often look for explanations in the realm of psychology (Bacharach, 1993, 1999, 2006; Smerilli, 2012; Sugden, 2000, 2003). Sugden (2002, 2018), in particular, suggests that team reasoning may have an emotional basis. In a historical argument (2002), he maintains that a reading of Smith's concept of *sympathy* or *fellow-feeling* can help capture the *relational nature* of team reasoning. According to the author's definition, Smith's fellow-feeling addresses "one person's lively consciousness of some affective state of another person, where that

consciousness itself has similar affective qualities—pleasurable if the other person's state is pleasurable, painful if it is painful" (2002, p. 71). Consciousness of fellow-feeling is a source of pleasure *in its own right*, not only when the initial state of mind was not pleasurable. This highlights an aspect that the related literature generally overlooks, that is, people may be motivated to endorse team reasoning by the *emotional pleasure* they experience when doing things *together with others*. In one of his latest works, Sugden (2018) goes even further, stating that Smith's concept of fellow-feeling can be understood as emotional contagion, an evolutionary mechanism that has been acknowledged in modern psychology and is needed to ensure the survival of individuals by the mutual alignment of individual behaviours in a group. In doing so, he highlights the importance of the emotional and affective qualities of team thinking. In the domain of philosophy, Anderson maintains that "what principle of choice it is rational to act on depends on a prior determination of personal identity" (2001, p. 30). Looking for a principle of self-identification, she presents a moral argument advocating a Kantian self-identification with all humankind, but she admits that she has no rational argument in favour of such a principle. Since no such criterion exists in a post-modern conception of rationality (Hollis, 1998), there is no logical reason to endorse team reasoning.

So far, I have expounded on different accounts of team reasoning, distinguishing between normative and descriptive accounts. I now endorse a general, descriptive definition of team reasoning as a *set of reasoning schemes* that allows individuals to perceive each other as partners in a joint endeavour and that may be activated in *a variety of situations*, involving coordination problems, cooperation problems and market behaviour. I also endorse Sugden's (2002) idea of relational team reasoning. My own understanding of this idea is that affective states of mind may significantly influence our identification with a given team.

To take team reasoning as a basis for normative recommendations, the question of group identification needs to be addressed. Indeed, commitment to a group is not ethically desirable per se³: a normative recommendation should state what group the individuals should (or should not) identify themselves with. A second question to be addressed concerns the relevant objective for the team. This is a question about the idea of good to be pursued. Practical implications of market ethics should follow from those two statements.

In their pioneering work, Bruni and Sugden (2008) propose an answer to both questions. The group that an

³ Readers of previous versions of this paper have argued that commitment to the Nazi ideology and practices is perfectly consistent with the logic of team reasoning and group identification. This is also recognised by Hollis (1998) as 'the dark side' of collective intentionality.

individual should identify with is constituted by the contract itself, which also defines the team's common goal: if the agents perceive their relationship as giving rise to a collective agent, then they are expressing a *fraternal orientation* to market relationships. This idea of mutual assistance implies that trading partners can take on responsibilities towards one another that go beyond the letter of their contract. This is of particular relevance in the market of care, characterised by asymmetries of information and power, and whenever the possibility of opportunism arises after the contract has been signed (Bruni & Sugden, 2008). Could team reasoning further constrain agents' behaviour, beyond the prevention of opportunism? The authors argue:

Just how far collective intentionality constrains behaviour in market relationships depends on how broadly the corresponding joint intentions are interpreted. At one extreme, one might say that the intention is only that each party benefits, according to his or her own subjective preferences and beliefs at the moment of sale. That does not take us beyond *caveat emptor*. At the opposite extreme, one might assert that the trading partners must define mutual benefit in terms of a common conception of human well-being which they both endorse (2008, p. 54).

This definition is wide enough to include a variety of motives to engage in a market relationship. It also avoids putting constraints on individual freedom when translating a fraternal orientation to market in practical, individual choices. Furthermore, this idea of team reasoning does not constraint individuals in choosing what contract to accept, as the authors maintain that the contract commits each party *solely within the boundaries of the contract*.⁴ However, this definition may have problematic implications when dealing with concrete market choices in a global society, particularly when conflicting views of human well-being are at stake. I argue that the closer a person's view is to the second extreme of Bruni and Sugden's spectrum, the more they would avoid certain specific contracts; and the wider the notion of human well-being that a person holds, the smaller their set of acceptable market exchanges will be.

In the next sections, I will expound on Genovesi's (2008, 2013) conception of social life and individual responsibility, to show that his view of mutual assistance entails the acceptance of one, historically determined, shared view of human well-being.

⁴ Such is needed to reconcile this idea with the principle that individuals choose their economic activities in response to private incentives.

What Mutual Assistance is: A Background

Genovesi's contribution to the economic debate of his time has been the object of growing interest in the history of ideas, starting from the seminal works of Bruni and Sugden (2000), Bruni (2006) and Bruni and Zamagni (2007). Recent contributions have inquired about the intellectual and philosophical foundations of his thought (Bruni & Santori, 2018; Pabst, 2018), highlighting its interconnections with an international debate (Porta, 2018) or stressing its similarities and common inheritance with Smith's (1759) theory of relationships (Dal Degan, 2018). Different authors have offered various interpretations and highlighted diverse elements, and the resulting picture is complex and rich. In this section, I summarise the main features of Genovesi's most cited works, *Lezioni di Economia Civile* (2013) and *Diceosina* (2008), which are relevant for understanding mutual assistance and which have been universally acknowledged in the related literature.

Genovesi was a reputable theologian and a moral philosopher who studied economics to make sense of the rapid growth of commercial societies and its moral implications. His writings can be read as attempts to establish new ethical and anthropological foundations of a harmonious social order under economic development (Bruni & Sugden, 2000, 2008; Bruni, 2006; Dal Degan, 2018; Porta, 2018). His view arose out of an attempt to mediate between the *veteres* (old school) of Giovanbattista Vico, Pietro Giannone and Paolo Mattia Doria and the *novatores* (new school) of Celestino Galiani and Bartolomeo Intieri (Bruni, 2006; Bruni & Sugden, 2000). The old school rooted its vision in the Aristotelian tradition, in which an unbreakable bond joined happiness, virtue and civil life, and it viewed economics as embedded in a network of moral values. Conversely, the new school took the ideas of Hobbes, Grotius and Mandeville as their reference points, treating individuals' pursuit of self-interest as the foundation of social, political and economic lives (Bruni, 2006). They also advocated the use of the experimental method of Newton and Galileo, bringing a Newtonian scientific vocabulary to the moral and the social spheres (Porta, 2018). From this perspective, mutual assistance is a central concept.

Genovesi's mutual assistance has been defined as the *sincere will* (i.e. not purely instrumental) to help others, with the expectation that such actions will be *reciprocated* (Bruni, 2006; Bruni & Sugden, 2008). This is not pure benevolence, as in Shaftsbury's theory, because it is not completely unconditional. It is also not simply a property of actions, as in Smith's (1776) theory of mutual advantage, because it requires the *intention* to help. Stated differently, mutual assistance is a *disposition*. Where does this disposition come from? The answer is found within Genovesi's anthropology.

According to the author, mutual assistance is rooted in the ‘primitive’ properties of human nature, hence having the status of natural law, consisting of both a reciprocal right to be assisted and a reciprocal obligation to assist each other: “Among natural rights we not only count that of being secure of his own properties, [...]; but also being assisted from other humans in his needs, the right of reciprocal assistance [...]” (2008, p. 48). This right is founded on three properties of human nature:

I. similar and reciprocally needy nature; II. energetic impulse that attracts humans towards other humans, such as love, friendship, sociability, mercy, pleasure of human conversation; III. true and hard utility, that stems [...] from mutual assistance (2008, p. 48).

Let us put aside point III and the meaning of ‘true and hard utility’ for a moment. What clearly emerges here is that the chief advantage of society for Genovesi comes not only from the provision of material goods, needed to ensure survival, but also from the provision of social relationships. (Bruni, 2006; Bruni & Sugden, 2000, 2008). Social relations are pleasurable in their own right, and they establish a precondition for the enjoyment of other pleasures. In this view, economic life is both an exercise of virtue and the domain of self-interest:

That which Shaftesbury said will be eternally true: he said that the true utility is the daughter of virtue; because it is eternally true that the great depth of man is the love for those with whom he lives. This is the love that is the daughter of virtue (2013, 31).

Virtue, indeed, is a constitutive element of human nature and life in society, able to mediate between extreme forms of human behaviour (Pabst, 2018). More precisely, virtue is needed to mediate between two fundamental drivers of human agency: self-love (*forza concentriva*) and ‘love of the species’ (*forza diffusiva*), that is, a desire for social relationships (Bruni & Santori, 2018; Dal Degan, 2018; Pabst, 2018; Porta, 2018). Those two forces are meant to counterbalance each other. Love of the species without self-love can destroy a person, while self-love without love of the species isolates an individual from others. Such harmony between self-love and love of others also entails a balance between the right to be assisted and the obligation to assist others. In other words, this balance is needed to build up relationships of mutual assistance. Mutual assistance, in turn, is needed to attain private interests; but in Genovesi’s Aristotelian view, individual interests go along with public happiness⁵ (Bruni,

⁵ This reconciliation between private utility and public virtue seems to be influenced by Vico’s heterogenesis of ends (Bruni, 2006). In Vico’s view, a divine and providential mechanism exists to orient human self-interested passions towards the common good; still, it is subsidiary, not in opposition, to the intentional seeking of the com-

2006). Happiness is indeed a combination of an individual’s development of personal talents and mutual flourishing, in the sense of shared well-being (Pabst, 2018). In this sense, ‘true and hard utility’ is a combination of individual and collective interests that ‘stems’ from mutual assistance.

Mutual assistance and team reasoning

Up to now, I have expounded on Genovesi’s (2008, 2013) idea of mutual assistance. According to Bruni and Sugden (2008), mutual assistance can be understood in terms of team reasoning, in opposition to Smith’s (1776) concept of mutual benefit.

Smith seems to be treating this mutual understanding as something like common knowledge in game theory: it provides the background knowledge against which individuals strategically pursue their separate interests. There is no suggestion that the parties are *jointly intending* a combination of mutually beneficial actions (Bruni & Sugden, 2008, 49).

Conversely, mutual assistance “seems to differ by requiring that the parties to a market transaction have a *more internalised* sense of its mutually beneficial nature” (2008, p. 49). In this perspective, the market relationship cannot be conceived of as purely instrumental. In the authors’ words:

Assistance is intentionally directed towards helping another person in her needs, towards being useful to others. If assistance is mutual, these intentions are reciprocal: each stands ready to help the others in the expectation that they stand ready to help her (2008, p. 46).

How is this joint intentionality rooted in Genovesi’s view of human nature and social life? I argue that three main elements are worthy of attention.

The first is the role of rationality in Genovesi’s anthropology. As an Enlightenment thinker, Genovesi aimed to create social order by establishing truth, which can be discovered by ‘correct’ or ‘right’ reason. In fact, reason plays a strong role in the process of balancing self-love with love of the species in order to generate a disposition towards mutual assistance (Bruni, 2006; Bruni & Sugden, 2000, 2008; Porta, 2018). From this perspective, ‘reason’ can be understood

Footnote 5 (continued)

mon good. Expressed differently, a divine intervention is needed because of human fallibility, but it also requires the human will to pursue public happiness by cultivating civil virtues. Likewise, Genovesi (2008, 2013) acknowledges the existence of a mechanism very similar to Smith’s (1776) invisible hands, though emphasising the need for civic virtues as fundamental assets of an economy.

as the “powers of theoretical and practical reasoning which can guide us in what we believe and do” (Hollis, 1998, p. 4). However, there is a stronger sense in which mutual assistance is bound with reason, particularly with the idea of instrumental validity. According to Genovesi, indeed, reason is the ability to regulate the means with respect to ends:

the physical law of reason is to calculate principles, means, and ends; here it follows the moral law, look at your end in every step, that is, calculate all the relationships between the actions [...] and the final aim, and here direct all (2008, 14).

However, reason alone is not self-sufficient, because the ultimate end of social action is the general good. Given such an ambitious goal, humans need ‘right’ or ‘correct’ reason, that is, reason ‘enlightened’ with certain ‘evident and fixed’ maxims (Genovesi, 2008, p. 29).⁶ It is worth noting that in the spirit of the Enlightenment, such maxims are not ‘external’ to reason itself but stem from a science of morals that studies the essential character of human nature and social life (Hollis, 1998).⁷ When guided by ‘right’ reason, people act for mutual assistance because they acknowledge that reciprocal vulnerability and reciprocal dependence are essential traits of human beings:

Firstly, it is not easy to find that someone constantly assists who declares [...] that he is not willing to assist anyone. [...] Secondly, the better is the civil body, the greater is the utility that is returning to each part [...]. The more the parts are better connected to the others, that is, the more one assists the other and [the more] one does his best to help the other, the better goes the civil body (2013, 23).

In other words, ‘right’ reason is functional for the achievement of the ultimate end of social action, which is happiness. In the Aristotelian view, happiness can only be pursued by investing in the flourishing of the entire society; in contrast, the pursuit of individual interest, without concern for others’ interests, appears as a kind of myopic behaviour. From this perspective, mutual assistance is instrumentally rational in the sense of being *the best means to achieve a collective goal*.

The second element is the role of morality in Genovesi’s (2008, 2013) framework. On one hand, mutual assistance is rational in the sense outlined above. On the other hand, moral internalisation is needed for moral science to guide behaviour, in as much as it can establish what is good for the

human being as a part of society. Moral internalisation lets mutual assistance become an ‘intention’ or ‘disposition’, not only exterior conformity to a standard of behaviour. How is it possible to translate moral internalisation in modern terms? Nelson (2009) maintains that this idea can be described in the concept of ‘intrinsic motivation’. Formulated in the field of psychology (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and adapted to the terminology of economics (Frey, 1997), this concept has taken on a broader meaning (Nelson, 2009). Broadly speaking, an intrinsic motivation is generated by an internal desire to help or contribute to the common good (Frey, 1997) or is driven by a human need for “relatedness and commitments to values of responsiveness, community, and care” (Nelson, 2009, p. 189). It is also related to empathy and emotional support. From a certain point of view, intrinsic motivation captures the way that autonomous agents may be driven by moral values, including Genovesi’s (2008, 2013) tension towards the overall good of society. However, the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation seems to exclude a priori that the pursuit of an *extrinsic* reward may be *the object of an intrinsic motivation*—otherwise, the distinction would make no sense. In other words, this distinction seems ill-adapted to the idea that the pursuit of a joint benefit may be both the result of moral internalisation and instrumentally oriented to an extrinsic gain (Bruni & Sugden, 2009). This seems to constitute a logic trap.

Team reasoning is a conceptual tool that can help us to escape this trap. Firstly, it is a form of instrumental reasoning, oriented to an extrinsic gain (Gold & Sugden, 2007): if an agent wants to pursue the team’s goal, is rational and knows that the others are rational as well, then he or she should act on team reasoning. At the same time, it also conveys ideas of ‘relatedness’, ‘commitment’, ‘community’ and ‘willingness to contribute’ through the concept of ‘group identification’, that is, the agent’s perception of being a member of a group, understood as a single entity in action. The real difference between team reasoning and the intrinsic motivation approach is that the latter bases the agents’ commitment on their motivations, while the former does not. In the team reasoning approach, group identification is simply taken as an assumption. This approach does not exclude that group identification may be driven by moral motivations, nor does it take such identification as a necessary starting point.

The third element concerns the universality of mutual assistance. Indeed, mutual assistance is oriented towards the benefit of the entire society; hence, it is universal in the sense of being non-selective, i.e. no one can be excluded from the opportunity to assist or to be assisted (Bruni & Sugden, 2008). Furthermore, it is universal in a stronger sense: it requires a *universal commitment* within society. This feature stems from the intrinsic conditionality that is embedded in the notion of ‘mutual’. Genovesi deals with this problem when discussing public trust, an issue that is central in CE

⁶ An example of such a maxim is ‘do not desire for others what you do not desire for yourself’ (Genovesi 2008, 77). On this point, see also Dal Degan (2018).

⁷ This can be displayed as a ‘naturalistic fallacy’.

literature (Bruni, 2006; Bruni & Zamagni, 2007). In *Lezioni*, ‘public faith’ or ‘public trust’ (*fede pubblica*) is described as the bond of society:

Where there is no faith, in what it constitutes the reciprocal confidence among citizens, in the security of bargaining, in the force of laws and in the science and integrity of judges, in the sanctity of religion, here there are no foundations of civil society, that are justice and humanity; because where there is no faith, there is no security of contracts, nor force of laws, nor confidence between man and man (Genovesi, 2013, 341) Therefore we can state that faith in civil bodies is like the force of cohesion in natural bodies, of reciprocal attraction; without which we can have no hard and durable mass, but everything is thin sand and dust (2013, 342).

Stated differently, trust can be defined as a general expectation that fellow citizens will honour contracts and eschew fraud. It also includes trust in the enforcement of contracts and in the functioning of legal institutions. More precisely, public trust can take three forms: economic, political, and ethical. The last one is the most important because it provides a basis for the other two forms: “Ethical trust is a reciprocal confidence between people, between families [...] founded on a belief of truthfulness, of religion, [...], of probity, and honourability of contracting parties” (Genovesi, 2013, 343).

How can we make sense of this universal commitment in the language of team reasoning? A good starting point is provided by Hollis’ (1998) distinction between trust as ‘predictability’ and as ‘doing what is right’. In the author’s words, “we trust one another to behave predictably in a sense which applies equally to the natural world at large. I trust my apple tree to bear apples, not oranges” (1998, p. 10). Hence, trust as predictability is a matter of inductive inference. Conversely, trust as doing what is right is based on a normative expectation. The author shows this point with the example of a loan: after lending something to a friend, we expect to get it back. This is not a prediction but what we believe the friend ought to do, based on a conception of ‘what is right’ or ‘what is good’. Such a conception may be predetermined in a particular group or society; thus, it is not ‘moral’ in the sense of constituting a universal reason for action.⁸

Obviously, there is a connection between the two forms of trust. Inductive inferences may be reliable but not guaranteed, at least when dealing with human agency. To have a ‘warranted prediction’ (Hollis, 1998, p. 10) about other people’s future actions, we need to *attribute purpose* to human

agents. Stated differently, we need to know the other agents’ *intentions*. How do we arrive at such knowledge? To answer this question, we need to know how agents form their intentions, which in turn seems to lead us back to ‘what is good’.

How does Genovesi understand trust? The emphasis on the enforcement of contracts and on the effectiveness of laws seems to point at the idea of trust as predictability. A similar idea can be found in the expression *buon costume*, that is, the “customary standards of acceptable or decent behaviour” or the “basic level of virtue which everyone is entitled to expect of everyone else” (Bruni & Sugden, 2000, 38). However, the use of terms such as ‘probity’, ‘justice’ and ‘religion’ suggests that citizens also need to share a common vision of ‘what is right’ and behave accordingly.

A careful reading of Genovesi’s idea of virtue seems to confirm this notion. I have already stressed that mutual assistance is bound with virtue as a tool to balance the opposing forces that influence the human being. However, virtue is also essential to ensure that commitment to mutual assistance is shared by the entire society. Virtue is indeed concerned with a broad set of intellectual abilities and moral habits. For example, it implies ‘correct knowledge of sciences and the arts’ and ‘correct use of objects’. More importantly, it relies on ‘correct knowledge’ of human psychology and moral laws, which is needed to form ‘right judgements’ in society. In other words, the existence of virtue is bound with knowledge of natural moral science so that every member of society acts on the common view of ‘what is right to do’. If, and only if, such knowledge is widely shared in a society,⁹ then civil society constitutes a covenant of mutual assistance.

The affective foundation of mutual assistance

So far, I have expounded on the main elements that make team reasoning a suitable concept for representing Genovesi’s (2008, 2013) idea of mutual assistance in the language of current economic theory and philosophy, examining his underlying view of rationality and morality in particular. In this section, I explain why Genovesi’s anthropology is well-suited for a relational account of team reasoning.

Attempting to explain why team reasoning is compatible with human psychology, Sugden (2002) has added an affective dimension to his theory. By a conceptual reconstruction of Smith’s (1759) sympathy vis-à-vis modern accounts of sympathy and empathy, he has tried to build a bridge

⁸ See Hollis (1998) and Sugden (2018) for the distinction between moral and social norms.

⁹ In both *Diceosina* and *Lezioni*, Genovesi recommends that the government should invest in institutions that spread this knowledge in order to channel human sensibility towards virtue.

between modern knowledge of human psychology and the eighteenth-century theories of human action. In the following discussion, I explore a similar link between Sugden's relational team reasoning and Genovesi's (2008, 2013) representation of human agency, focussing on the affective states of mind.

Human passions play a crucial role in Genovesi's view of human agency. The ontological structure of humanity is described as a blend of instincts, affections and passions (Dal Degan, 2018; Pabst, 2018; Porta, 2018). In turn, these states of mind shape human action through "pain", defined as "every unpleasant sensation" (Genovesi, 2008, 19) or "annoying irritation", including "desire" and "agitation" (Genovesi, 2013, 32). In both *Diceosina* (2008) and *Lezioni* (2013), Genovesi provides a taxonomy of pains. In *Lezioni*, three types of pain are assumed to exist¹⁰: pains resulting from "natural sensations", from "sympathetic or antipathetic energy" and from "consideration and refinements of thought" (2013, p. 33). The first category includes pains arising from physical sensations and seems to be related to basic needs: thirst and hunger, cold and warm, or illness. The second category is concerned with something very emotional and immediate that precedes reflection. The pains included in this category are those "of first reaction" (*'di primo rapporto'*). Conversely, the third category includes pains "of second reaction or of reflection" (*'di secondo rapporto, o di riverbero'*), that is, arising from certain mental elaboration, which include "a great multitude of desires" (2013, p. 32).

In this taxonomy, Genovesi is apparently trying to formulate a theory of states of mind, even if his result is not completely developed. In so doing, he establishes certain links of causation from one mental state to another and between mental states and external inputs. In this theory, passions of first reaction play a stronger role compared to the sensations and feelings included in the other two categories. Moreover, they seem to be mechanically linked to external inputs. Indeed, passions of first reaction may arise from "sympathetic" and "antipathetic energy", which in turn are activated by the "simple presence" of an "object" or an "image", generating the perception of "consonance" or "dissonance" with a person's "nature" (2008, p. 20; 2013, p. 33). In turn, consonance and dissonance are the basic determinants of pain: "Here certain feelings of love and hate, compassion and anger, inclination and aversion arise [...], effects of purely mechanical reasons, anything else than consonance and dissonance" (2008, p. 20).

¹⁰ *Diceosina* provides a more detailed taxonomy on this point; for the purpose of this paper, I use the simpler taxonomy expounded in *Lezioni*.

Expressed differently, the pain arising from passions of first reaction seems to be activated by an emotional response to situations that a person perceives as aligned or misaligned with one's own sensibility. It is worth noting that the moral conscience plays a role in this 'mechanical' process as well.¹¹

Nonetheless, what exactly are these passions of first reaction? They can be not only anti-social ("guilty"), such as hate, fear, disgust, jealousy and anger, but also pro-social ("good"), such as love, mercy, friendship and compassion (2013, p. 34), sociability and taking pleasure in human conversation (2008, p. 48). In short, the discussion is about negative and positive *affective states of mind*. Nevertheless, Genovesi maintains that the sympathetic principle, generating pro-social passions, plays a stronger role, being "the source of three quarters of human actions" (2013, p. 34).¹² Of course, passions may be disruptive: they can push humans "out of the proper path" (2008, p. 23) when ungoverned by reason and virtue. However, pro-social passions seem more natural, more strongly inherent in human beings. Indeed, Genovesi claims that repulsive passions are not spontaneous since they are generally triggered by an offence (2008).

Interestingly, two passages from *Diceosina* and *Lezioni*, respectively, describe a mechanism that is quite similar to Smith's concept of *sympathy* or *fellow-feeling*: "When we see sudden pain of another person, we [are horrified] and feel tender mercy [...]: this is another internal feeling [showing that] humans are made for other humans" (2008, p. 169). The author also states¹³:

It is a characteristic of man of not being able to enjoy a given good without sharing it with somebody else. Some say that it is self-love or pride (*superbia*) to show our happiness to others. I don't think so: it seems to me that there is in us an inner need to communicate our happiness to one another (Genovesi, 2013, I, chapter 16, §2, footnote).

This is the affective foundation of mutual assistance. For this reason, mutual assistance needs to be understood as the 'real' interest of the individual because it is in one's interest to alleviate pains arising from sympathetic energy:

¹¹ A comprehensive discussion on the role of moral conscience is provided in the first chapter of *Diceosina*, Book I.

¹² It is also worth noting that both self-love and love of the species stem from sympathetic energy (2008, 24); hence, self-love can be understood as an attraction to oneself that is needed to ensure survival (albeit one that is insufficient by itself, given that it is an intrinsic vulnerability of human beings).

¹³ This passage is also cited by Bruni (2006, p. 75) and Dal Degan (2018, p. 11).

But if by interest we mean indulging to, and assuaging, those pains, troubles and discomforts consisting of those species that we mentioned, to the restlessness of the soul, and to any good or guilty passion, we would find we do not act under any other principle (Genovesi, 2013, 34).

To sum up, mutual assistance is neither a mere matter of reason nor a matter of moral internalisation, as it stems from a relational ability that is inherent in human psychology, pushing the individual to seek others' well-being along with one's own.

Why is it relevant to stress the relational and affective content of mutual assistance? As suggested by Sugden's (2002, 73) reading of Smith's (1759) work, "the psychology of fellow-feeling and the correspondence of sentiments is tightly linked with that of approval and disapproval; and approval and disapproval form the basis of our sense of morality" (Sugden, 2002, p. 73). A similar idea can be found in Genovesi (2008), although his argument is not as fully developed as Smith's. This idea is implicit in the concept of virtue. I have stated that virtue is concerned with the acquisition of 'right' judgements in society, based on knowledge of moral science. However, the process of forming moral judgements cannot be carried out in solitude because it needs social relationships, as the actor must take into account the viewpoints of others (Dal Degan, 2018; Porta, 2018). Indeed, this process includes the willingness to gain the respect and esteem of one's fellow citizens, as well as the ability to be grateful (2008, p. 186).

In a nutshell, Genovesi's concept of virtue includes a broad set of abilities necessary for a person to properly live within society. This process of socialisation shapes a person's propensity for mutual assistance as part of their more general disposition towards a given understanding of good. This idea may be a matter of affective states of mind, grounded in a person's inclusion within society. Addressing his recommendations to a relatively homogeneous and hierarchical society, Genovesi tries to convince his readers that a society of mutual assistance will stem from such a process.

What Mutual Assistance Is, and What It Could Be in the Contemporary World

In previous sections, I have described Genovesi's idea of mutual assistance as a form of team reasoning, implying a universal commitment in society to a shared end and relying on a relational conception of the human mind. Following this argument, Genovesi's idea of mutual assistance can be defined as a *rational and moral disposition, giving rise to instrumentally rational behaviour, intentionally oriented to help others in all domains of social life*. It is rooted in human

psychology, stemming from a common vision of what is good for the individual as a social agent and implying a universal commitment to it. In this sense, Genovesi's mutual assistance can be understood as a benchmark of universal and rational team reasoning, as it advocates in favour of the pursuit of one shared understanding of good, looking at all of humanity as one global team. Normative recommendations on practical market choices are thus particular expression of this general ethics of civil life.

An interesting implication of this reading of Genovesi is the idea that some contracts may be ethically undesirable. In other words, a Genovesian account of mutual assistance would constrain the agents *in their choice among the items in the set of possible contracts*, not just within the boundaries of the contract. This would occur whenever the pursuit of a specific market transaction opposes society's general goals.

To understand this point, imagine that someone needs to choose between two cleaning products: one very effective but highly polluting, and the other performing slightly worse but more eco-friendly (a situation that many people actually face in their ordinary lives). In this case, there is a trade-off between individual payoff in terms of effectiveness and collective payoff in terms of environmental welfare. Stated differently, the person needs to choose between a transaction that has a negative externality for society as a whole and a transaction that has fewer negative externalities. Anyone who is concerned with environmental issues would recommend the second option, even if the individual would incur a loss of individual welfare due to the loss of effectiveness. In other words, an environmentally concerned moral agent would agree that this option would be the best means for all human beings as one global community, including future generations—a topic that is quite popular in the current environmental debate. Expressed differently, proponents of this view seem to have endorsed a group identification with all humankind, as well as a shared view of 'what is good'. Such an identification seems perfectly compatible with a Genovesian concern for the entire humanity and implies a pre-existing common view on well-being—or at least on its ecological components.

A similar argument can concern fair trade. A common definition of fair trade is that provided by the association of fair trade organisations known as FINE,¹⁴ which describes it as a tool to enhance "sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalised producers" (Moore, 2004, 73; see also Becchetti & Huybrechts, 2008; Ballet & Carimentrand, 2010).

¹⁴ FINE is an informal network of Fair Trade organisations. It includes the Fair Trade Labeling Organizations International (FLO), The International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT), the Network of European Shops (NEWS!), and the European Fair Trade Association (EFTA).

This definition implicitly recalls an existing idea of what human well-being is, one that is to be preserved through responsible market exchanges. This is articulated in a series of organisational criteria (small-scale producers, democratic decision making, no discrimination) and trading conditions (fair price, social premium, prefinancing, long-term relationship) that follow from the pursuit of ‘fairness’, notwithstanding the unavoidable diversities in companies’ missions, legal forms and customers (Becchetti & Huybrechts, 2008).

Another interesting issue here concerns the distribution of surplus among the contracting parties. Is equality a component of human well-being, and should greater equality of wealth be brought about through daily market choices? In the literature related to mutual assistance, equality is usually examined as an *ex ante* condition for the contracting parties to perceive their interaction as fraternal (Bruni & Sugden, 2008, 2009; Gui, 2009). However, the question may also concern the distributional effects of a market transaction and their moral relevance vis-à-vis a shared understanding of human well-being. If substantial equality among citizens is understood as a component of society’s well-being, then a mutual assistance approach to market relationships would prescribe that market transactions exacerbating inequalities among citizens and countries should be avoided.

However, equality is not only a matter of income distribution. For example, Satz (2010) stresses that the operation of certain markets undermines the capacity of the parties to interact as equals, even when they contract voluntarily. In other words, some markets may be ‘noxious’ to the extent they “support objectionably hierarchical relationships between people” (Satz, 2010, p. 4). For example, those markets include women’s reproductive capacities and sexual labour. If they endorse a mutual assistance approach to market ethics, exponents of this view may recommend that those kinds of contracts be avoided. This example suggests that broader constraints over the choice of contracts may be entailed when a person’s idea of well-being expands to encompass different components of good: opposition to war (i.e. avoiding investments in the weapons industry within the ethical finance movement), human health, civil rights, and so on.

Up to this point, I have assumed that moral agents endorse a Genovesian identification with all human beings, and a common view of good. In what follows, I will accept the first assumption, but I will remove the second. In doing so, I will try to test a mutual assistance market ethics against a post-modern conception of good, while endorsing Anderson’s (2001) recommendation of a Kantian identification with the entire human being.

The consequences of conflicting views of good are particularly evident when addressing equality as a value to be pursued by society. Indeed, universal consensus on this point may not be taken for granted. Evidence in social psychology

(Jost et al., 2003; Piff et al., 2018) show that some social groups tend to believe that economic inequality is legitimate and necessary for the functioning of society, and that ideologies of merit reinforce economic inequality and class division. A similar argument concerns Satz’s noxious markets. Global society is far from reaching a general agreement on the impact of those markets on human well-being, and on their relationship with human rights. To give an example, the feminist debate over sexual labour is highly polarised, with one side seeing prostitution as a tool of domination and exploitation, and one side defending sex work as potentially empowering (Jeffreys, 2009; Wahab & Panichelli, 2013). Therefore, exponents of the second view may think that frequenting prostitutes is perfectly compatible with a mutual assistance approach to economic relations. Similar concerns may be raised in relation to the existence of reproductive markets. Those examples suggest that different conceptions of ‘what is good’ may conflict with one another when markets are seen as tools to promote human well-being through practices of mutual assistance.

Different conceptions of good may also depend on dynamics of personal identity. I have shown how, according to Genovesi, the process of forming moral judgements is not only a matter of knowledge of moral science, but also a matter of socialisation, as it partially depends on the affective dynamics of social esteem and approval. This idea is compatible with a constructivist conception of truth. When we get rid of the Enlightenment idea of a science of morals able to discover one immutable truth, we can expect that personal and group identities may shape the agents’ perception of ‘what is good’. As such, conflicting views of good may arise in a heterogeneous society, where agents are affiliated with different social groups and personal identity is highly fragmented. Hence, understanding the dynamics of group identification becomes a particularly important and urgent task.

Final Remarks

In this paper, I have attempted to further develop Bruni and Sugden’s reading of Genovesi, highlighting the problematic aspects of a CE or team reasoning-based account of market ethics. First, I have reviewed existing theories of team reasoning to provide a definition that can capture its descriptive relevance. I also have highlighted the problematic issues underlying its endorsement as a normative recommendation. Then I have expounded on Genovesi’s (2008, 2013) view of the human being, social life, and trust, highlighting how it implies a universal commitment in society to a unique, shared view of ‘what is good’ for universal well-being. I have used this view as a benchmark for universal and rational group identification, to point out the practical

implications of this view which may imply broad constraints on market choices. I also have suggested that as on individual's understanding of good expands, broader constraints over market choices may be implied. Conflicting implications are possible when the assumption that there is one shared and universal notion of well-being is challenged, in accordance with a post-modern conception of rationality.

In team reasoning-based ethics, markets can be a tool of civic engagement and social change. Nevertheless, as global society becomes increasingly diversified, new challenges will emerge as people seek to reconcile different ideas of what general aims are to be pursued by the global team of humanity. The environmental emergency and the Covid-19 pandemics have shown that this is a historically urgent task, as Anderson suggested in 2001. However, the true basis for mutual assistance between reasonable persons still seems to be an open question.

Acknowledgements I am grateful to Professor Luigino Bruni and to Professor Robert Sugden for their observations and discussions on the topics of this research. Moreover, I would like to thank the two anonymous referees for their comments of a previous version of this paper. I also would like to thank Paolo Silvestri and the participants at the conference "Economics, Law and Humanities: Homo-what?" (29th World Congress of the International Association for the Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy, University of Lucerne, Switzerland, 7–13 July 2019) for their comments. Last, but not least, I would like to thank my colleague Paolo Santori for his support and suggestions.

Funding The author did not receive support from any organisation for the submitted work.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The author has no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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