

## CHAPTER I.

### IS EXPLANATORY INDIVIDUALISM CONCEPTUALLY NECESSARY?

In Chapters III-VI, I will argue that we can understand the distinction between actions and mere happenings by appealing to the concept of normative expectation rather than to the concept of intention. One source of resistance to this notion may derive from an action theorist's adherence to the explanation-based approach to the problem of action. Such theorists typically start with a theory of action explanations and then build a theory of action in terms of the elements singled out in the theory of action explanation. Philosophical discussions centering around action explanations typically mention as explanatory elements intentional attitudes of the agent not expectations to which the agent is held by other people. It may accordingly appear as if the conceptual distance of the concept of normative expectation from the concept of action is too great for the former to be used in the theory of action.

In section 1, I identify the positions of explanatory individualism, nonindividualism and anti-individualism about action explanations. Roughly, according to explanatory individualism actions are explained in terms of the agent's pro-attitudes; according to explanatory anti-individualism, actions are explained in terms of other people's pro-attitudes toward the agent; according to explanatory nonindividualism, some actions are explained in terms of the agent's pro-attitudes, others in terms of other people's pro-attitudes toward the agent (without being explained in terms of the agent's own pro-attitudes). In section 1.B, I distinguish between explanatory and normative individualism, each coming in a reductive and a nonreductive version. I offer two preliminary considerations in support of a nonindividualist position: the testimony of our practices (section 1.A) and an evolutionary consideration (section 2). The bulk of the

chapter (section 3) is devoted to showing that a variety of arguments for explanatory individualism fail. I will conclude that explanatory nonindividualism is not incoherent. In the final section 4, I shall endorse normative individualism. I suggest that much of the appeal of explanatory individualism derives (though it ought not to) from the appeal of normative individualism.

### 1. Individualism vs. Nonindividualism about Action Explanations

“He went to the store because his mother wanted him to bring her some butter for the cake she is baking.” “I went to the library because my friend is in the hospital and she asked me to get her some good book to read.” “I just told him I forbid him to come near my house, and he stopped bothering us.” — These are just some examples of ordinary explanations of actions. What they all have in common is that they relate, in one way or another, how one person’s wish, desire, expectation (pro-attitude) influences another person’s action. Indeed, the thought that we can *sometimes* affect what others do by wanting, asking or telling them to act in certain ways is rather common-sense. We do this all the time. This is reflected in our practice of ordinary action explanations — we do allow explanations of one person’s actions in terms of the pro-attitudes of another person.

This fact is a little jarring if one looks through the extensive literature on action explanation, folk psychology, and our ordinary practices for attributing mental states. With literally a few exceptions,<sup>1</sup> only intentional explanations, i.e. explanations that appeal to the *agent’s own* pro-attitudes, are discussed. Some authors speak as if our ordinary action explanations are intentional explanations; others discuss only intentional explanations. This suggests that nonintentional explanations (explanations that appeal to other people’s pro-attitudes) tend not to be considered as being on a par with intentional explanations, and that intentional explanations tend to be privileged in one way or

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<sup>1</sup> Annette C. Baier, “Rhyme and Reason: Reflections on Davidson’s Version of Having Reasons,” in (eds.) Ernest LePore, Brian P. McLaughlin, *Actions and Events* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 116-129; *Postures of the Mind. Essays on Mind and Morals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985); Leszek Nowak, *Power and Civil Society. Toward a Dynamic Theory of Real Socialism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991). Georg Henrik von Wright, “Explanation and Understanding of Action,” in *Practical Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 53-66.

another. Below, I will distinguish some ways in which intentional explanations can be thought to be privileged over nonintentional explanations (section B). In general, the position according to which the action explanations that appeal to the agent's own pro-attitudes are privileged over explanations that appeal to other people's pro-attitudes will be termed individualism about action explanation. Correspondingly, nonindividualism about action explanation will allow the appeal to the pro-attitudes of people other than the agent himself to have, in certain circumstances, import similar to the appeal to the agent's own pro-attitudes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> There are at least three debates that one ought not to confuse with the one intended here. First, there is a debate between individualists and anti-individualists in the philosophy of language and mind, where the question is whether our concepts can be individuated solely in terms of the states of the individual person who possesses the concept (the individualist position) or in terms that reach beyond the states of the person into the surrounding world (the nonindividualist position). See e.g.: Daniel C. Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge, MA.: Bradford Books, 1987); John R. Searle, *Intentionality. An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Tyler Burge, "Individualism and the Mental," in (eds.) Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., Howard K. Wettstein, *Studies in Metaphysics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), pp. 73-122; Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of Meaning," in (ed.) Hilary Putnam, *Mind, Language and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 215-271.

Second, there is a debate in the philosophy of action concerning the question whether only individual persons can be properly thought to be agents (individualism about the unit of agency) or whether certain kinds of collectives (e.g. firms, states, groups, institutions) can also be thought to act (collectivism about the unit of agency). Although this debate is orthogonal to the opposition between individualism and nonindividualism, as I will understand it, the dissertation has as its consequence the denial of individualism about the unit of agency. But this is a welcome consequence. A prominent reason for asserting that only individuals can act is if one shapes one's concept of action on the model of a bodily movement caused by a pro-attitude, which pro-attitude is in turn understood as a physiological state of the agent's body. The understanding of action advanced here departs from any such model, and we shall see that there remains no impetus for denying the natural view that groups, families, states, schools can all act.

Third, another question that one may ponder is whether it is possible for a human agent (in the proper sense of the term) to exist without society. Atomists (sometimes called individualists) hold that there is nothing incoherent in the supposition of a solitary agent; holists (sometimes called nonindividualists) hold that our relations with others are constitutive of our nature as agents.

The final and closest question concerns the extent to which the existence of social regularities compromises our picture of ourselves as intentional agents. Individualists deny, while collectivists affirm, that social regularities challenge intentional psychology. This debate (and in particular its distinction from the atomism vs. holism debate) has been put into sharper focus in Philip Pettit's *The Common Mind. An Essay on Psychology, Society, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). It is closest to our concerns although nonindividualism, as it is understood here, is not exclusively tied to the thought that social regularities compromise the individualistic picture of ourselves. It does, however, challenge that picture. (I discuss some connections between collectivism as Pettit understands it and nonindividualism, as it is here understood, in "Collectivism on the Horizon: A Challenge to Pettit's Critique of Collectivism," forthcoming in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*.)

## A. A Variety of Folk-Psychological Action Explanations

Although it might appear a little pedantic to make this point, it is clear that there is more to our ordinary explanations than explanations in terms of intentions, beliefs, pro-attitudes, hopes, etc. Without pretending to offer an exclusive or exhaustive list of types of ordinary explanations of actions, there are at least six kinds of explanations we offer. (1) We give explanations in terms of the agent's pro-attitudes (intentions, wishes, convictions, pro-attitudes, hopes, etc.), but (2) we also offer explanations that cite a feature of the agent but not a pro-attitude (explanations in terms of the agent's character or personality or habits). Moreover, (3) we give explanations that invoke pro-attitudes but not those of the agent (others' pro-attitudes, wishes, commands, requests, expectations of the agent). (4) We also offer explanations that neither invoke pro-attitudes nor cite a feature of the agent but rather cite a situation in which the agent finds herself, the social role she plays, the customs or norms that bind her. (5) We frequently invoke explanations in terms of goals, aims, aspirations, as well as (6) explanations in terms of facts, such as that it is raining, or that the school year has begun. And so on.

No one doubts that the first class of explanations constitutes a part of our folk-psychology. Also explanations in terms of character or personality traits are becoming more of a part of the picture of our ordinary explanations. This is partly due to the revival of virtue ethics and partly due to the fact that those explanations have been at the forefront of explanations of actions offered by social psychologists.<sup>3</sup> Also explanations in terms of goals and facts (such as those cited above) have been thought to be part of the explanatory enterprise, though many authors took them to be enthymematic forms of intentional explanations.

The matter presents itself differently for explanations of the third and fourth kind. The main source of resistance to acknowledging them as genuine explanations of actions

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara von Eckhardt has recently argued that the philosophical conception of folk psychology seems to be completely blind to explanations in terms of personality traits: "The Empirical Naiveté of the Current Philosophical Conception of Folk Psychology," *delivered at the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association and the Third Meeting of the Pittsburgh-Konstanz Colloquium in the Philosophy of Science* (1995). It is worth mentioning here that Donald Davidson includes not only pro-attitudes but also something like character traits in the category of pro-attitudes (see the quote in footnote 4).

comes from the adherence to causalism, i.e. to the view that the explanatory elements mentioned in the explanations of action must be causally related to the actions themselves. On this picture, the mention of another person's pro-attitude or of the social situation in which the agent finds himself seems hopelessly distant from the actual causal chain that generated the event we count as action. The explanation of action must proceed via some attitude of the agent.<sup>4</sup> (I will explore this point later.) By contrast, on the alternative (teleological) construal of explanations according to which action explanations do not explain by appealing to causes but to ends or goals of the agent, the third and fourth kinds of explanations seem *prima facie* less suspect.<sup>5</sup>

G.H. von Wright is among the few who clearly acknowledge those kinds of explanations.<sup>6</sup> He distinguishes two broad classes of reasons: internal (inner) and external (outer). He characterizes inner reasons as ones that are necessarily reasons for action: "no-one who is familiar with action discourse could, without committing an inconsistency, deny that aiming at something and thinking a certain action promotive of this aim is *a* reason for doing it."<sup>7</sup> Aside from actions done on inner reasons, there are ones done in response to "orders, requests, questions, ... [and] other signals" as well as to "(prescriptive) rules or norms, and ... customs, fashions, or traditions within a community."<sup>8</sup> These varied circumstances von Wright jointly calls outer reasons, which in contrast to inner reasons are related to action only contingently. This is to say that

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<sup>4</sup> Donald Davidson gives the following characterization of the inclusive category of pro-attitudes which includes: "pro-attitudes, wantings, urges, promptings, and a great variety of moral views, aesthetic principles, economic prejudices, social conventions, and public and private goals and values *in so far as these can be interpreted as attitudes of an agent* directed toward actions of a certain kind. The word 'attitude' does yeoman service here, for it must cover not only permanent character traits that show themselves in a lifetime of behavior, like love of children or a taste for loud company but also the most passing fancy that prompts a unique action, like a sudden pro-attitude to touch a woman's elbow." ("Actions, Reasons, and Causes," in *Essays on Actions and Events* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980], p. 4, emphasis added.)

<sup>5</sup> G.M. Wilson makes the point that this is also a reason why the teleological conception of explanations is a more natural rendition of our ordinary action explanations than the causal one (*The Intentionality of Human Action* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989].) Also, many of G.E.M. Anscombe's examples have this form (*Intention* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957].). Not to mention the fact that among Wittgenstein's favorite examples is that of ordering or commanding (*Philosophical Investigations* [New York: Macmillan, 1958]).

<sup>6</sup>G.H. von Wright, "Explanation and Understanding of Action," *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 54, original emphasis.

“even though the agent recognizes the challenge [a certain situation such as a request] and has learnt or otherwise knows how to respond to it, he need not *acknowledge* it as a reason *for him* to act upon.”<sup>9</sup> It should be stressed, however, that although von Wright thinks that the connection between outer reasons and actions is less tight than the connection between inner reasons and action, he nonetheless thinks that the agent can be said to act on outer reasons thus understood.

In the individual case, it may ... be difficult or even impossible to tell whether the agent obeyed an order *because* he had been ordered, or *because* he feared punishment for disobedience. His motives might have been “mixed.” But it would be a distortion to think that his action *must* have had internal reasons and *could not* have taken place on purely external grounds.<sup>10</sup>

Whether von Wright’s position is justified as a position in the theory of action explanation we will have to explore further. For now, the point is, however, that (insofar as our ordinary ways of thinking about actions can be seen as embedded in the ways in which we explain actions) it is part and parcel of the way we ordinarily *think* about actions that it is possible for us to act not only on our own intentions, desires, or wishes, but also on others’ expectations, desires, or wishes, on others’ requests or commands, or on norms explicit or implicit in our social lives. Of course, there might be good reasons for thinking that this liberal and literal attitude toward our practices of explaining actions is too liberal and literal. In particular, one might argue that our practices are subject to certain pragmatic pressures and that is why we offer explanations that we do not really mean to be offering. I shall discuss various reasons for holding such a view later (section 3). At present, I merely want to register the *possibility* that the fact that we do explain our actions in these diverse ways is in fact integral to our understanding of action explanation.

Before proceeding, I should point out that although we shall see in Chapter VII how to account for at least some of the plethora of ordinary action explanations, for present purposes, two kinds will be singled out: intentional explanations, i.e. explanations

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 55, original emphasis.

that appeal to the agent's pro-attitudes, and what I will call nonintentional explanations, i.e. explanations that appeal to another person's pro-attitudes.<sup>11</sup>

## B. Normative and Explanatory Individualism

So far, I have characterized individualism as a position on which intentional explanations are privileged over nonintentional explanations, and nonindividualism as a position that rejects individualism. The characterization is wanting, however. I will accordingly distinguish four different individualist positions and two respective nonindividualist positions. Before doing so, let me say a few words about the concept of a pro-attitude.

Davidson gives a very inclusive characterization of the category of pro-attitudes. Included are: "desires, wantings, urges, promptings, and a great variety of moral views, aesthetic principles, economic prejudices, social conventions, and public and private goals and values in so far as these can be interpreted as attitudes of an agent directed toward actions of a certain kind."<sup>12</sup> This inclusive category can be illuminated by appeal to Anscombe's notion of direction of fit.<sup>13</sup> Anscombe distinguishes two kinds of mental attitudes. There is a group of mental attitudes such that if the world does not accord with them, they are at fault (beliefs belong to this category). And there is a group of mental attitudes such that if the world does not accord with them, the world is at fault (intentions, desires belong to this category). Beliefs (that *p*) are in general attitudes such that if it is the case that not-*p*, the belief has to be abandoned. They have a mind-to-world direction of fit.<sup>14</sup> Intentions, desires, pro-attitudes in general (that *p*) are attitudes such that if it is the case that not-*p*, they dispose the agent toward making it the case that *p*. They have a world-to-mind direction of fit. I should emphasize that the category of pro-attitudes

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<sup>11</sup> I should stress that the use of the term 'nonintentional explanation' is dictated by terminological convenience. Strictly speaking, of course, all the explanations that are not intentional explanations could be thought to be nonintentional. However, since our discussion until the end of Chapter VII will focus on just one kind of nonintentional explanations, viz. those that appeal to the pro-attitudes of persons other than the agent, I shall reserve the term for those kinds of explanations.

<sup>12</sup> "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> This thought underlies Michael Smith's theory of desire ("The Humean Theory of Motivation," *Mind* 96, 1987, 36-61). I consider the implications of Smith's account for nonindividualism in section 3.C, below.

understood as those attitudes having a world-to-mind direction of fit will include not only desires (the paradigmatic motivating attitudes of the Humeans) but also noninstrumental beliefs (the paradigmatic motivating attitudes of the Kantians).<sup>15</sup>

Four individualist positions can be obtained by crossing two criteria. First, the individualist thesis for privileging the agent's pro-attitudes in relation to that agent's action may concern either the rationalizing or the stronger explanatory relation between reasons and actions. Second, the individualist positions may differ with respect to the force that they attach to the thesis. The position may be merely committed to the thesis that in all cases, the intentional explanations are privileged in one way or another. But they may also hold the stronger thesis that the privileging holds at the expense of any nonindividualist positions. Let us consider them in turn.

On the weakest position of (inclusive or non-reductive<sup>16</sup>) *normative individualism* (which will be discussed in greater detail in section 4, where the reason for giving it the name will be clearer), for any action that we intuitively explain nonintentionally, it is possible to attribute to the agent some pro-attitude toward the action:

(NI) For any action, the agent  $\alpha$  has some pro-attitude toward the action.

In other words, normative individualism is a position according to which every action can be rationalized in terms of the agent's pro-attitudes. To say that it is possible to attribute a pro-attitude toward the action is to say that the action is justified by the pro-attitude,

<sup>14</sup> Note that there is a certain ambiguity in how to read the phrase 'mind-to-world'. It is customary to read it "mind-(ought)-to-(fit)-world" rather than, as might be tempting, "(from)-mind-to-world."

<sup>15</sup> The category of "moral views" also figures in Davidson's list (see the quote above). Smith's paper in which he originally proposed this broad understanding of desire was meant as a defense of a Humean theory of motivation. It has been argued against Smith, however, that his argument against Kantians is unsuccessful. For there is nothing on Smith's account to prohibit certain attitudes (noninstrumental beliefs) from having a dual direction of fit: world-to-mind (characteristic of motivational attitudes) and mind-to-world (characteristic of cognitive attitudes). For more on this see e.g., I.L. Humberstone, "Direction of Fit," *Mind* 101 (1992), 59-83; Philip Pettit, "Humeans, Anti-Humeans, and Motivation," *Mind* 96 (1987), 530-533; G.F. Schueler, "Pro-Attitudes and Direction of Fit," *Mind* 100 (1991), 277-281; Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). For us the important point is that the issue between the individualists and the nonindividualists is orthogonal to the issue between Kantians and Humeans.

<sup>16</sup> I shall adopt the convention of speaking of reductive normative (respectively, explanatory) individualism but omitting the adjective 'inclusive' or 'non-reductive' when speaking of (inclusive or non-reductive) normative (respectively, explanatory individualism) unless to emphasize the point made.

that the agent *may* have performed the action because of that pro-attitude. This is not to say, however, that the agent actually acted *because* of that attitude.

The force of the ‘because’ in question is the one made famous by D. Davidson. We may rationalize an action by giving the reasons that the agent had for acting in that manner but this is not yet tantamount to our explaining his action. For to say that a reason explains the agent’s action is to say not only that the agent had the reason while acting but that the reason was efficacious in bringing the action about, that the agent acted *for* that reason. In these terms, normative individualism is committed merely to the thesis that for any action, it is possible to list reasons the agent had for acting, but it is noncommittal with respect to a stronger thesis, that for any action, some reason of the agent explains the action.

A stronger position would exclude any pro-attitudes of other people from rationalizing the agent’s action. The *reductive normative individualist* not only holds (NI) but also:

(rNI) Only  $\alpha$ ’s pro-attitudes can rationalize  $\alpha$ ’s actions (can be reasons for  $\alpha$  to act).

Reductive normative individualist will thus oppose the thought that my friend’s wanting me to go to a concert with her can possibly rationalize my going there with her. Only *my* wanting to go to the concert or *my* wanting to oblige my friend could rationalize my action. A non-reductive normative individualist will see no problem in allowing my friend’s wishes to rationalize my action as long as there are pro-attitudes of mine that rationalize my action as well. In either the non-reductive or the reductive flavor, normative individualism concerns only the rationalization relation that holds between the agent’s pro-attitudes and his action. The stronger explanatory relation is of concern to explanatory individualism.

The weaker (non-reductive) *explanatory individualism* holds not only that every action is rationalizable in terms of some pro-attitude of the agent but that every action can be *explained* in terms of some pro-attitude of the agent.

(EI) All  $\alpha$ ’s actions are explained by some pro-attitude of  $\alpha$ .

According (EI), when an agent acts, not only can we always attribute some belief and pro-attitude that will rationalize the action, but, in addition, the agent acts *because* of some of his beliefs and pro-attitudes. A position that is stronger still is *reductive explanatory individualism*. Reductive explanatory individualism not only endorses the thesis that any action is explained by some pro-attitude of the agent but it puts forward the stronger thesis that no action of one agent can be explained by a pro-attitude of another person:

(rEI) Only  $\alpha$ 's pro-attitudes can explain  $\alpha$ 's actions.<sup>17</sup>

Explanatory individualists oppose the thought that my friend's wanting me to go to the concert caused me to go to the concert with her unless some of my desires (at the very least to oblige my friend) was an intermediary. They allow another person's pro-attitude to explain the agent's action provided it is *mediated* by some pro-attitude of the agent. Reductive explanatory individualism, on the other hand, rejects the thought that somebody else's pro-attitude can be explanatorily relevant to the agent's action.

Given these four individualistic positions, all of which in some respect privilege intentional explanations, we ought to ask which of the positions the nonindividualist must reject. There is no question that any nonindividualist must reject the reductive theses (rNI) and (rEI). An *explanatory nonindividualist* might reject in addition (EI) without rejecting (NI). Such a nonindividualist will hold that while some of our actions are explained by our own pro-attitudes, there are also actions that are explained by others' pro-attitudes without being mediated by the pro-attitudes of the agent. Such a nonindividualist would not deny, however, that the actions that are properly explained nonintentionally ("caused" by others' pro-attitudes) can still be rationalized in terms of the agent's pro-attitudes. By contrast, a *normative nonindividualist* might adopt the

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<sup>17</sup> We may summarize the relation between the various theses as follows:

(NI)  $(\forall x) [Ax \supset (\exists y) (Ryx \ \& \ Py)]$     (rNI)  $(\forall x) [Ax \supset (\forall y) (Ryx \supset Py)]$   
 (EI)  $(\forall x) [Ax \supset (\exists y) (Eyx \ \& \ Py)]$     (rEI)  $(\forall x) [Ax \supset (\forall y) (Eyx \supset Py)]$

where ' $Ax$ ' stands for ' $x$  is  $\alpha$ 's action', ' $Py$ ' — ' $y$  is  $\alpha$ 's pro-attitude, ' $Rxy$ ' — ' $y$  rationalizes  $x$ ', ' $Eyx$ ' — ' $y$  explains  $x$ ', and (rNI) is the thesis that reductive normative individualism holds in addition to holding (NI), likewise for explanatory individualism.

position that there are actions that are not rationalizable in terms of the agent's pro-attitudes but only in terms of the pro-attitudes of others.<sup>18</sup>

We should reflect on the fact that the nonindividualist positions have been defined relative to individualist positions. The reason for this is that nonindividualism in general constitutes a more faithful representation of common sense. The spirit of *nonindividualism* is *inclusive*: it allows that we act because of our own pro-attitudes as well as because of those of other people. What it opposes is, accordingly, the *exclusive* positions of both *individualism*, and a parallel position of *anti-individualism*.

There are few, if any, anti-individualists, but it may help to appreciate the pluralistic and tolerant spirit of nonindividualism to but briefly characterize parallel anti-individualist positions. (NA) *Normative anti-individualism* would be a position according to which we can rationalize all of an agent's actions in terms of others' pro-attitudes. (rNA) *Reductive anti-individualism* would hold that we can only rationalize an agent's actions in terms of others' pro-attitudes but not the agent's own. (EA) *On explanatory anti-individualism*, all of an agent's actions could be explained by others' pro-attitudes. And finally (rEA), the thesis that the agent's actions could only be explained by others' pro-attitudes is characteristic of the *reductive* version of *explanatory anti-individualism*.

Chapter VII will allow us to understand how it is possible to act on another person's pro-attitude without acting on any of the agent's pro-attitudes (the position of explanatory nonindividualism). In this preliminary chapter, however, my concern is solely to argue that the arguments for explanatory individualism are not conclusive, and so to argue against the supposition that explanatory nonindividualism is incoherent (section 3). In section 4, I shall discuss some reasons that might be responsible for the fervent adherence to individualism, suggesting that they support normative individualism at the very best, not explanatory individualism.

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<sup>18</sup> One might think that the candidates for such actions are cases that Allan Gibbard has baptized 'social akrasia' (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings. A Theory of Normative Judgment* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990]). An excellent example is given by Stanley Milgram's experiments on obedience, where (*Obedience to Authority* [New York: Harper & Row, 1969]) the experimental subjects follow the commands of the experimenter *against* their better judgments.

It may pay to be reminded of Dennett's distinction between two levels at which folk-psychological concepts are used: subpersonal and personal.<sup>19</sup> The dispute between the nonindividualist and the individualist concerns the appropriate way of reconstructing our folk psychology at the personal level. It is thus perfectly appropriate for a nonindividualist to claim that explanations in terms of others' pro-attitudes do not require the involvement of the agent's pro-attitude (if the pro-attitude-talk is understood at the personal level) and yet allow the subpersonal investigations of cognitive psychology to postulate pro-attitude-like states on the part of the agent.

One final point demands emphasis. The individualist, anti-individualist and nonindividualist positions are all characterized in terms of the relation between the agent's action and the agent's and other people's *pro-attitudes*. For an explanatory nonindividualist to allow for the possibility that an agent acts on another person's pro-attitude without the mediation of his own pro-attitudes is not to deny that the agent's beliefs may be involved in his acting. In fact, we will see that a certain kind of beliefs will be relevant to the selectional model of acting for a reason (Chapter VII).

## 2. Individualism, Nonindividualism and Evolution

Before venturing any further, it might be worthwhile to throw the nonindividualist thought we are considering against the background of our evolutionary development. It has been argued that the evolution of human beings favored and selected rational behavior.<sup>20</sup> Humans who were able to conduct themselves in rational ways were better off than those who were not. Since rational conduct consists (in part at least) in satisfying one's desires<sup>21</sup> to the best of one's knowledge, this gives one reason to believe that humans will, in normal conditions, be rather good at satisfying their desires. While this line of thought is perfectly reasonable (and nothing I say serves to undermine it — except for altering its status), theorists have also come to recognize the evolutionary

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel C. Dennett, "Three Kinds of Intentional Psychology," in *The Intentional Stance*, *op.cit.*, pp. 43-82.

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Daniel C. Dennett, "Intentional Systems," in *Brainstorms* (Cambridge, MA: Bradford Books, 1981), pp. 3-22, and "True Believers: The Intentional Strategy and Why It Works," in *The Intentional Stance*, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-35.

<sup>21</sup> I use 'desire' very broadly. It should be taken to be synonymous with 'pro-attitude'.

advantage of another kind of conduct — conformism. It has been argued that there is a distinct evolutionary benefit for us in conforming.<sup>22</sup> It is reasonable to assume that the patterns of behavior adopted by a particular group of people have been tested out in the particular kinds of situations and environment in which the group tends to find itself. It may be beneficial for an individual joining such a group to use the tested out patterns of behavior (thus adopting the wisdom of the past) instead of risking that the behavioral pattern of his invention will be selected out. This is the selectional advantage of conformism — of our acting not on our own minds but rather on other people’s minds.<sup>23</sup>

These two parts of the evolutionary story are in no way exclusionary. They simply illustrate the presence of forces supporting, on the one hand, the development of a tendency for us to be independent, acting on our own convictions, and on the other hand, the development of the converse tendency for us to depend on others. Insofar as both forces have been operational, we would expect our lives to be an arena for a struggle between these two tendencies in certain situations. And this thought has a true phenomenological ring to it. The nonindividualist idea that we sometimes act on our own pro-attitudes and sometimes on others’ pro-attitudes simply reflects this evolutionary heritage. And just as the ‘individualist’ part of the evolutionary story (taken on its own) would support the individualist’s commitment to the thought that in normal conditions we act on our own beliefs and desires, so the whole story should support the nonindividualist thought that we ought to extend our understanding of what happens in normal conditions to encompass not only our acting on our own desires but also our acting on others’ desires.

The two-pronged nature of the evolutionary account also suggests adopting a suspicious attitude toward the reductionist strategy of the individualist. In insisting that all actions done on others’ pro-attitudes (in normal conditions) are reducible to actions done on the agent’s pro-attitudes, the individualist in effect gives priority to one of the prongs in the evolutionary story. This would be understandable if there were a

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Boyd, Peter Richerson, *Culture and the Evolutionary Process* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985).

<sup>23</sup> Note that this is not tantamount to saying that there are evolutionary grounds for our acting *against* our own minds (the impression to the contrary may be dictated by the ambiguity discussed in section 3.B).

conceptual competition between the two evolutionary tendencies. If they were incompatible with one another, that would give a reason for being an *individualist* (and preferring the individualist prong, thus conceiving of all actions as done on the agent's own pro-attitudes, in normal conditions) or for being an *anti-individualist* (and preferring the nonindividualist prong, conceiving of all actions as done on others' pro-attitudes, in normal conditions). But there is no conceptual competition between the two parts of the evolutionary account. The only competition there is (if there is any at all) concerns the question which of the forces takes precedence in the agent's action in particular circumstances. But if so, then we find no evolutionary reason to suspect that the reductionist strategy should be the one to hold the most promising — whether in its individualist or anti-individualist form. In fact, we find every reason to believe that the two parts of the evolutionary story will be reflected in the way in which we are 'designed'. This supports<sup>24</sup> the *nonindividualist* (in contrast to the anti-individualist) thought that we sometimes act on our own minds and sometimes on those of other people.

### 3. Arguments for Explanatory Individualism

Explanatory individualism is incompatible with explanatory nonindividualism. According to explanatory nonindividualism, it is possible for some actions of the agent to be explained in terms of somebody else's pro-attitude without being mediated by any pro-attitudes of the agent. Explanatory individualists deny this possibility. My sole aim in this section will be to disarm arguments that might favor explanatory individualism.

It should be emphasized that the goal is to cast doubt on the conclusiveness of such arguments, but not to suggest that there are no reasons for adopting explanatory individualism. Rather, I claim that the reasons for developing an explanatory individualist

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<sup>24</sup> This is not a definitive argument for nonindividualism and against individualism. It is also not the kind of consideration that someone who is already convinced of the truth of individualism is going to find appealing in any way. Someone like that will embrace everything that is said here and simply reinterpret the idea of acting on another person's mind in individualist terms (acting on one's own mind which is open to what another person might want, for example). This consideration might be appealing, however, to someone who suspended his commitment to either position and declared himself open to considering the

position are not strong enough to render explanatory nonindividualism incoherent. I will argue that it is not necessary, not that it is not possible, to believe (EI) to be true. It would be erroneous to give the impression that the assembled arguments exhaust the reasons for (EI). But *prima facie* they give rather powerful support to the position.

In section A, we will see how, contrary to appearances, the natural conception of pro-attitudes as internal states of the agent does not threaten the nonindividualist interpretation of folk psychology. In section B and section C, I consider two arguments designed to show that it would be incoherent to think that an agent may act on another person's pro-attitude without acting on a pro-attitude of her own. We will see that neither the argument from breakdown cases (section B) nor M. Smith's argument (section C) establishes that conclusion. In either case, there is conceptual room for the nonindividualist position.

#### A. Internal States and Individual Action

Perhaps it is best to begin by dissipating a worry that may be responsible for a certain incredulity with which a nonindividualist understanding of folk psychology might be met. It is customary to construe pro-attitudes as internal states of an agent.<sup>25</sup> It is also customary to construe actions as events that are caused by the agent's, among others, internal states. But if so, then it might seem that whatever other person's pro-attitudes may be relevant to the agent's performing the action, the agent's pro-attitudes are necessarily involved, for they cause the very event in question. To deny the involvement of the agent's pro-attitudes is to deny the involvement of the agent's internal states, and this is unintelligible.

The argument begs the question against the nonindividualist in an important way. Just as it is customary to construe pro-attitudes as internal states and actions as events

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result of such an evolutionary argument as at least a reason (albeit not a decisive one) for adopting a position on the matter.

<sup>25</sup> There are important exceptions, among them: Lynne Rudder Baker, *Explaining Attitudes. A Practical Approach to the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); D.C. Dennett, *Brainstorms, op. cit.*; D.C. Dennett, *The Intentional Stance, op. cit.*; Jennifer Hornsby, "Which Physical Events are Mental Events," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 81 (1980-1), 73-92. The point of the argument survives

caused *inter alia* by the agent's internal states, so it is customary to understand our attributions of pro-attitudes as part of a holistic attempt to understand an agent's behavior.<sup>26</sup> According to this last position, any particular internal state of a person counts as the agent's pro-attitude that *p*, for example, only insofar as an attribution of a pro-attitude that *p* would maximize our understanding of the person's behavior. Such an attribution is regulated by our adherence to certain claims about human behavior, in particular, the claim that people act on their beliefs and pro-attitudes. In other words, the identification of our pro-attitudes presupposes a certain understanding of our folk psychology.

At this point, the nonindividualist must claim that the nonindividualist understanding of folk psychological explanations will affect the very identification of our pro-attitudes. If we allow at the outset that aside from acting on their own pro-attitudes, people also act on others' pro-attitudes, then we might seek the maximization of our understanding of a person's action not by attributing a pro-attitude to that person but rather by attributing a pro-attitude to another person. Think of a scenario when one person exhibits a certain behavioral pattern only in the presence of a certain person. While, of course, defeasible, this would count as a *prima facie* evidence that the person does what she does because of the involvement of the other person.<sup>27</sup>

But if this is so, then a nonindividualist can also uphold all three customary positions. He may hold the customary view that pro-attitudes are internal states. He may hold that actions as events are caused *inter alia* by the agent's internal states. And he

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even if one does not identify pro-attitudes with internal states, as long as pro-attitudes are conceived to be causally efficacious states of the agent.

<sup>26</sup> D. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, *op. cit.* D.C. Dennett, *Brainstorms*, *op. cit.* and *The Intentional Stance*, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> That we do as a matter of fact exhibit the tendency to interpret actions in such terms is a matter of common sense. Those a little more skeptical will benefit from a reminder of what Allan Gibbard has called the phenomenon of social akrasia, the paradigmatic example of which is Milgram's experiments (see *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, *op. cit.*). Such cases appear to be most naturally explained as the agents acting on the experimenter's wishes, commands or requests. In these cases, the individualist (who holds that we act on our beliefs and pro-attitudes) experiences the same sort of conceptual discomfort he experiences in cases of akrasia. For just as in cases of akrasia, we seem forced to interpret the action in terms of the agent succumbing to a temptation, acting on a weaker pro-attitude, so in the cases of social akrasia, we seem forced to interpret the action in terms of the agent succumbing to another, acting on someone else's pro-attitude against her own.

may hold that pro-attitudes are attributed as part of a holistic attempt to understand an agent's behavior. The fact that actions are caused by the agent's internal states does not mean that actions must be caused by the agent's pro-attitudes since not all internal states of the agent are the agent's pro-attitudes. Only those states of the agent that we would have holistic reasons to understand as pro-attitudes are pro-attitudes. And by accepting the nonindividualist reconstruction of folk psychology, a conceptual space opens for not understanding all performances of an agent in terms of that agent's pro-attitudes.

#### B. The Argument from Breakdown Cases

One way of supporting the individualist would be to show that for any nonintentional explanation of action (i.e. an explanation that does not mention the agent's pro-attitudes) there must be an intentional explanation of the action (mentioning some pro-attitude of the agent). The argument from breakdown cases purports to do just that.

The line of thought is quite simple. It becomes evident that for any nonintentional explanation (citing another person's pro-attitude) there exists (even if it is not explicitly mentioned) an intentional explanation of the action, when we imagine an appropriate counterfactual situation. Let some nonintentional explanation why an agent performed an action be given. Imagine now what would happen were that agent *not* inclined (in one way or another) to perform the action in question. It seems clear that *ceteris paribus* had she not wanted to perform the action (under some description), she would not have. But since she did perform the action she must have wanted to perform it (under some description).

Consider an example. Let us suppose that someone asks you for directions to Sydney. You give him the directions. Why did you give the directions? Because he asked for them. We understand your behavior by appealing not to your pro-attitude to give directions to the person but rather by appealing to that person's having asked you for directions. But, the objector continues, the fact that this explanation is natural (if not obvious) does not yet show that there is no intentional explanation accompanying it. And she wants to suggest that in fact there *must* be an accompanying intentional explanation. This is because *had* you *not* wanted to give the person directions you *would not* have. So, since you did give the directions, you must have wanted to after all.

But what makes us think that you would not give directions if you did not want to? Well, you might have thought the driver looked suspicious and you did not even want to come near the car. You might have been upset by the daily events, or someone just running into your groceries, and did not want to help any member of the human race. Many events like this, or even spur-of-the-moment viciousness might have made you not want to give him directions and not give the directions *even though* you were asked.

We should, however, reflect on the fact that we easily tend to skip over a scope ambiguity with respect to negation.<sup>28</sup> It is one thing to *want not* to do something (in the sense of having a con-attitude toward it), it is another *not to want* to do something (in the sense of lacking a pro-attitude toward it, possibly being neutral with respect to it). This difference is very easy to overlook. Consider the announcement: “I have no intention of complying with the court’s order.” The claim is certainly not that suggested by the surface grammar — the speaker is not expressing a lack of an intention. To the contrary, she is announcing an *intention not* to comply. Or when a child says “I don’t want to play with him,” she is not expressing a lack of attitude.

Bearing this distinction in mind, it is clear that in order to argue that a pro-attitude is a necessary part of any action explanation, the objector has to show that had the pro-attitude been missing (rather than had the con-attitude been present) the agent would not have done as he did (*ceteris paribus*). But if we look again at the sorts of examples that made us think that you would not give directions to the stranger if you “did not want” to do so, we will discover that they are ones where you *wanted* to *avoid* doing so, where you *wanted not* to do so. In neither of these hypothetical cases do you lack a want to give directions to the driver. You do not merely lack a pro-attitude when you think the driver suspicious and “do not want” to come near the car — you actually have a con-attitude: you *want to avoid* coming near his car. Likewise, you have a negative attitude toward helping others if you are angry. And so on. But if so, then the argument does not show what it purports to show. It does not show that for any nonintentional explanation there

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<sup>28</sup> The ease with which we fall prey to this kind of ambiguity has been emphasized in the recently developed logic of agency. See e.g. Nuel Belnap, Michael Perloff, “Seeing to It that: A Canonical Form for Agentives,” in (eds.) H.E. Kyburg, Jr., R.P. Loui, G.N. Carlson, *Knowledge Representation and Defeasible Reasoning* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990), pp. 175-199.

must be an intentional one because it skirts over the scope ambiguity in its fundamental premise.

In fact, little reflection is required to see that the individualist could not have hoped to make use of this argument. For intentional psychology can only predict or explain what the agent would do given that he *has* some pro-attitude.<sup>29</sup> The theory offers no insight into what happens when the agent *lacks* an pro-attitude.<sup>30</sup> So, the argument from breakdown cases not only does not but could not show that an intentional explanation must accompany any nonintentional explanation. Since the argument does not prove that it is necessary to invoke an agent's pro-attitude to explain her action, it does not show the nonindividualist interpretation of folk psychology to be incoherent.

### C. The Argument from Smith's Theory of Desire

The refutation of the argument from breakdown cases indicates that there is some conceptual room for the claim that the agent need not have acted on any of his pro-attitudes. Or, at any rate, we must not suppose on such grounds that the agent must have acted on some of his pro-attitudes when performing the action. Recently, Michael Smith<sup>31</sup> has argued on different grounds not only that desires must be present in every action but that they are the source of all motivation. Smith presents an extremely simple argument in support of the contention that every motivating reason must include a desire and so that every instance of an action for a reason must have had its source of motivation in a belief-desire pair. He argues<sup>32</sup>:

- (1) Having a motivating reason *is, inter alia*, having a goal.

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<sup>29</sup> For this reason also, it will not do to replace the idea of "wanting" in the original argument with a "weaker" pro-attitude like "being inclined to" or "thinking that something was to be said for." Moreover, these cases do not exhibit any special features with regard to the formal structure that underlies the argument. As long as it is possible to drive a wedge between the having of a respective con-attitude and the lacking of a pro-attitude, the argument will go through. It might get more clouded in view of the "weaker" nature of the pro-attitudes. See also section 3.E, below.

<sup>30</sup> One could argue that while intentional regularities indeed allow us to predict only what the agent would do if he had some pro-attitudes, intentional psychology as a whole allows us to do more. For it to do so, it must be assumed that intentional psychology offers a *complete* picture of human behavior. This assumption would render the argument question-begging against the nonindividualist.

<sup>31</sup> "The Humean Theory of Motivation," *op. cit.*, and *The Moral Problem, op. cit.*

<sup>32</sup> "The Humean Theory of Motivation," *op. cit.*, p. 55.

(2) Having a goal *is* being in a state with which the world must fit.

(3) Being in a state with which the world must fit *is* desiring.

Hence a motivating reason includes, among other things, a desire. We will see that even if this argument is sound, it does not tell us *whose* desire must be included in the motivating reason. In fact, I will argue that Smith's argument cannot offer a non-question-begging way for showing that it must be the agent's desire.

The best place to begin is with the notion of direction of fit which guides Smith's account. Following Anscombe, Smith conceives of desires as states with which the world must fit. My desire that I pick up a piece of paper aims at its realization, and is realized when I pick it up. So, it is plausible to suppose that my desire that you pick up a piece of paper also aims at its realization and is realized when you pick it up. Since both my and your actions are part of the world there is no *prima facie* reason why only my and not your actions must fit my desires.<sup>33</sup>

One may object, at this point, that while the extension of the metaphor of the direction of fit *prima facie* makes sense, Smith's account does not rest with the metaphor. For Smith explicates the guiding metaphor in terms of a dispositional account. He identifies a desire to  $\phi$  with 'that state of a subject that grounds all sorts of his dispositions: like the disposition to  $\phi$  in conditions  $C$ , the disposition to  $[\psi]$  in conditions  $C'$ , and so on (where, in order for conditions  $C$  and  $C'$  to obtain, the subject must have, *inter alia*, certain beliefs)'.<sup>34</sup> Since a desire thus conceived is the agent's disposition to act and so to change the world according to the desire, it has the distinctive world-to-mind direction of fit.

Can our extension survive this explication? It will need to be modified, of course. Just as Smith identified  $\alpha$ 's desire to  $\phi$  with the state of  $\alpha$  that grounds  $\alpha$ 's dispositions to  $\phi$  in  $C$ ,  $\psi$  in  $C'$ , so we might identify  $\beta$ 's desire that  $\alpha$   $\phi$  with that state of  $\beta$  that grounds

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<sup>33</sup> Of course, there has to be some explanatory connection in play. I give an account of the connection in Chapter VII.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52. The original formulation is misleading since it does not allow erroneous beliefs. A pro-attitude to  $\phi$  (drink gin and tonic) might be realized where the conditions  $C$  are such the agent believes of what is petrol that it is gin, and is accordingly motivated to  $\psi$  (drink petrol and tonic). Smith corrects it in *The Moral Problem*, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

all sorts of  $\alpha$ 's dispositions to  $\phi$  in  $C$ , to  $\psi$  in  $C'$ . So my desire that you pick up a piece of paper is that state of mine that grounds your dispositions to, among others, pick up pieces of paper when I ask you to do so, when I expect you to do so, etc.

Whether this characterization makes sense depends on what we understand by "grounding." This idea must be cast in counterfactual terms. To say that the disposition to dissolve in water in conditions  $C$  is grounded in properties  $P$ , is to say something to the effect: were a substance with properties  $P$  immersed in water in conditions  $C$ , *ceteris paribus* it would dissolve. But the idea of "grounding" also involves an appeal to an explanatory connection between the state and the dispositions. Thus, we want to say that the microstructural properties of water which we describe as solubility can explain why a piece of salt immersed in water (in the right conditions) would dissolve.

If so, then we can cast the idea of desire in the following form

$\alpha$ 's desire that  $\alpha$   $\phi$  is the state  $d$  of  $\alpha$  that explains  $\alpha$ 's dispositions to  $\phi$  in  $C$ , to  $\psi$  in  $C'$ ,

which implies, among other things, that were  $\alpha$  not in  $d$  *ceteris paribus*  $\alpha$  would not  $\phi$  in  $C$  or  $\psi$  in  $C'$ .<sup>35</sup> To require that an explanatory relation be invoked is not immediately to say anything about the explanatory relation in place. This leaves us room to understand desires directed toward others accordingly as explaining another person's dispositions:

$\beta$ 's desire that  $\alpha$   $\phi$  is the state  $d'$  of  $\beta$  that explains  $\alpha$ 's dispositions to  $\phi$  in  $C$ , to  $\psi$  in  $C'$ ,

which implies that were  $\beta$  not in  $d'$  *ceteris paribus*  $\alpha$  would not  $\phi$  in  $C$  or  $\psi$  in  $C'$ .<sup>36</sup>

It could be objected that Smith's theory commits us to the thought that even if in the case where  $\beta$ 's state is explanatorily involved, we need to interject  $\alpha$ 's desire. How

<sup>35</sup> Or, at any rate, that  $\alpha$ 's  $\phi$ ing in  $C$  or  $\psi$ ing in  $C'$  would be accidental.

<sup>36</sup> One could object at this point and argue that this is too liberal an understanding of the idea of "grounding." What Smith intends is surely to pick out some state of the individual agent that explains her dispositions to act. To this, one can respond amicably. It may very well be that this is what Smith intends since he is only concerned with pro-attitudes directed to the agent's own actions. But this accidental focus on the pro-attitudes directed at the agent's own actions hardly constitutes a reason against the nonindividualist. If Smith's account were to be used against the nonindividualist, there would have to be actual reasons for thinking that there is something wrong in thinking of grounding in this liberal manner. Smith, for one, does not produce any.

so? Well, presumably what  $\beta$ 's state explains is  $\alpha$ 's dispositions. But for all these dispositions of  $\alpha$ , there is going to be a state of  $\alpha$  that is going to explain them. This state, on Smith's account, just is  $\alpha$ 's desire. So, even in the cases where the agent responds to somebody else's desire, he still acts on his own desire. And this is just what the individualist claims.

But this claim is not as innocent as it seems. We should note, first of all, that explanation can occur at different levels. It would be hard not to grant the objector that even in cases where we claim the agent's disposition to  $\phi$  is naturally explained by some state of another person  $\beta$ , there is a level of explanation at which some state of the agent  $\alpha$  explains  $\alpha$ 's disposition to  $\phi$ .<sup>37</sup> Presumably, this is plausible for some physiological level of explanation. But the question is why this fact should affect the nonindividualist identification of desire. There are two options here. Either the individualist will find reasons to restrict the explanatory attention to the agent's state at the level of action (qua action, rather than qua physiological event) explanation or not. If the individualist does find such reasons then the suggested nonindividualist extension of Smith's account of desire to include others' desires directed toward an agent's actions will be unwarranted. But in such a case the employment of Smith's argument against the nonindividualist relies on having arguments against the nonindividualist already. For to suppose that there are reasons (at the level of action explanation) to restrict the search for explanatory states to the states of the agent is already to have an argument for an individualist position. Smith's argument gives no additional resources to the individualist.

If the individualist does not find reasons to restrict attention to the states of the agent at the level of ordinary action explanations then it is not clear why the nonindividualist should be in any way impressed by the insistence on the fact that the agent's body must have been in a physiological state disposed to the production of certain bodily motions. The nonindividualist should not be impressed any more than he would be by the fact that the agent's arm must have been in the right kind of causal disposition to cooperate in the carrying out of the action. The nonindividualist does not deny that the

individual's states must have been causally involved in the action, but he will object to identifying those states as the agent's desires (see section A, above). Once again, Smith's argument does not advance the individualist cause.

The upshot of the discussion is this. Smith's argument shows that when an action is done for a reason, there is a desire in play understood as having a distinctive world-to-mind fit. What Smith's argument does not differentiate between is whose mind is in play. It can be the agent's mind that the world must fit. But there is conceptual room for the thought that it can be another person's mind.

#### D. The Problem of Mere Happenings

It is customary to suppose that a performance is an action just in case it is intentional under some description. If we take it that a performance is intentional under some description only if it has been caused by the agent's pro-attitude and a suitably related belief, we have a straightforward problem for the nonindividualist. To the extent that a performance is an action at all, it must have been caused by the agent's pro-attitude, period.

The argument is valid, but it is not clear that its premises must be accepted. For one, there is no consensus on the precise shape of the second premise, though perhaps enough consensus could be forced against the nonindividualist. One might also reject the first premise. I will show how to do so in Chapters III-VI. It may be worthwhile, however, to sketch the shape of the account.

The core of any theory of action is the account of the distinction between an action (the agent raising an arm) and a mere happening (the arm rising on its own). There are two traditional strategies of approaching the problem. On one hand, one may characterize what it is for a performance to be an action, by appealing to the performance's intentional etiology. Alternatively, however, one may characterize what it is for a performance to be a mere happening, appealing to conditions that interfere with our agentic involvement (defeating conditions), and characterize actions as those

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<sup>37</sup> Though, perhaps, one might be more wary in supposing that there is one state of the agent that explains all the relevant dispositions.

performances of the agent that are produced in the absence of defeating conditions.<sup>38</sup> On the former strategy, an agent's raising his arm is an action to the extent that the performance has been caused (in the right way) by some of his pro-attitudes. On the latter strategy, an agent's raising his arm is an action of his to the extent that the arm movement has not been caused by a spasm, by someone else's grabbing it upward, etc.

The appeal of the latter strategy to a nonindividualist should be clear. It allows us to drive a conceptual wedge between a performance being explainable by the agent's pro-attitudes and its status as an action. The performance's status as an action is determined by the absence of defeating conditions; thus as long as being explainable by other people's pro-attitudes does not count as a defeating condition, the threat to nonindividualism is averted.

#### E. Explanatory Individualism: Innocent Pro-Attitudes

So far, our main target has been the explanatory individualist's claim that the agent's pro-attitudes must explain the agent's actions. But I have also provided some reasons to open the conceptual space for explanatory nonindividualism, which allows that there are some actions that can be explained without reference to the agent's pro-attitudes. In this section, I want to consider an argument that may be taken to show that explanatory nonindividualism is false if one properly understands the attribution of pro-attitudes.

It may be suggested that I have misconstrued the role of pro-attitudes. Would it not be possible to construe pro-attitudes innocently? It is after all so natural and immediate to suppose that when someone asks me for directions, I will give directions only if I believe that he asked me for directions and only if I have a pro-attitude to comply with his request or to give him directions, etc. As long as one agrees that the belief and pro-attitude do not usurp explanatory power from the request itself, and as long

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<sup>38</sup> This strategy has its roots in Aristotle's characterization of voluntary action in terms of what is not involuntary (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1111a22-24), and has been pursued by contextualists (e.g. H.L.A. Hart, "The Ascription of Responsibility and Rights," in (ed.) Anthony Flew, *Essays on Logic and Language* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1951], pp. 145-166; A.I. Melden, *Free Action* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961]).

as one holds a sufficiently non-phenomenological conception of beliefs and pro-attitudes, this position should be unobjectionable. The fact that it is so natural to attribute pro-attitudes to the agent in the explanation of every action, coupled with the provisos about the innocence of such attribution, might appear to support the position of explanatory individualism.

The position is not as innocent as it appears, however. The argument relies on the fact that it is very natural for us to attribute pro-attitudes to the agent. And I think this is largely right for reasons I discuss in section 4. However, this is insufficient as a ground for supporting explanatory individualism. In the absence of further considerations, the fact that it is so natural for us to attribute pro-attitudes to the agent no matter what the agent does would support normative individualism not explanatory individualism. In view of the flexibility of our intentional framework, we can always attribute zillions of pro-attitudes and beliefs, and taking into account various sorts of constraints, select a couple of attributions that fit the behavior best. But, as Davidson has reminded us, this is not sufficient to argue that the pro-attitudes thus attributed actually *explain* rather than merely *rationalize* the agent's action. An argument for explanatory individualism would require an argument that it is always possible to attribute pro-attitudes to the agent that actually *explain* the agent's behavior. The fact that it is so natural to attribute pro-attitudes to the agent merely supports the position that all actions can be rationalized in terms of the agent's pro-attitudes, i.e. the position of normative individualism. And that position is perfectly compatible with explanatory nonindividualism.

#### F. The Common-Sense of Nonindividualism

The distinctive nonindividualist claim is then that we can act on others' pro-attitudes just as we can act on our own pro-attitudes. We have seen that our practice does appear to support the nonindividualist picture, and that at the same time many of the arguments that might have been expected to show the nonindividualist position to be incoherent, fail. I want to close by considering once more the individualist strategy for accommodating actions that we intuitively explain by appeal to others' pro-attitudes.

The individualist has two options. First, he can consider such actions as occurring under 'normal' conditions, in which case he must suppose that the action is mediated by

the agent's pro-attitude to perform it. Second, he can consider them to be cases of the aberrant type, in which case the agent acts on another's pro-attitude and against her own. Here are two examples paradigmatic of the categories. Suppose I ask you to tell me to switch on the light. You tell me to switch on the light and I faithfully do so. It is very natural to describe such a case as one where *I* wanted to obey your command, and did so for this reason. Suppose you tell me to switch on the light, and I really want not to do so, but do it anyway for "reasons" I do not myself understand very well. Such a case belongs to the aberrant class of cases.

The cases that do not fall neatly in either of these categories are cases where the agent acts on another's pro-attitude, not against her pro-attitude but without having a pro-attitude of her own at all. (These are the cases which are conveniently obliterated by the ambiguity mentioned in section B.) Suppose that an agent rides in a bus, has no particular pro-attitude to stand one place or another, is in fact not very concerned with the ride at all. Within limits, she does not care what happens in the bus. A person comes in and asks politely "Could you, please, move over a little." The agent, of course, moves over — after all she does not care one way or another.

It is intuitively implausible to construe the agent as now having to consult her pro-attitudes as to what to do, to construe her as now having to decide whether or not she should move over. The individualist might argue that the relevant pro-attitudes need not be construed as coming into the foreground but may operate in the background.<sup>39</sup> We may first stomp our foot and ask, Why do we need to suppose that? Why go against the natural way of thinking about such a case? What reason does one have for insisting on this? Surely, it is not that had the agent not wanted to move she would not have done it. This argument, as we saw, relies on an equivocation on the idea of the agent not wanting to move and is quite compatible with the nonindividualist picture. And Smith's argument will not help here either because its employment would be question-begging at this point. So, why not simply adopt the natural picture? The agent moves over because the other person wants her to move over, period.

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<sup>39</sup> Philip Pettit, Michael Smith, "Backgrounding Desire," *Philosophical Review* 99 (1990), 565-592.

Moreover, the proposal that the relevant pro-attitudes reside in the background seems to contradict our supposition that the agent genuinely does not care what happens in the bus. And if the individualist insists that her not-caring attitude is only an expression of her not having any pro-attitudes in the foreground, he is dangerously close to asserting that for *any* state of affairs, we have either a pro- or a con-attitude toward it — at least in the background.

It is natural to think that our commonsense understanding of ourselves involves the supposition that unless we really want not to comply with others' requests (and are strong-willed enough to carry out our wants), we generally will comply with them. This thought could be seen as embodied in the idiom of "not-minding," for instance. Sometimes when asked why we have, say, complied with another person's request, rather than answering that we wanted to do so, we say that we did not mind. This is an interesting phrase because quite literally what it expresses is not the presence of a pro-attitude but rather the absence of a con-attitude.

The individualist interpretation of folk psychological explanations abstracts from normal everyday interaction between people and begins exclusively with the perspective of the agent. Insofar as it then takes into account any interactions, it always does so through that perspective. But what exactly justifies such an abstraction in the first place? The individual perspective is no doubt very important, but why should we in thinking about ourselves abstract from our ordinary interactions? As Annette Baier reminds us, "My first concept of myself is as the referent of 'you', spoken by someone whom I will address as 'you'."<sup>40</sup>

#### **4. Normative Individualism**

In section 3.E, I have noted how natural it is for us to attribute pro-attitudes to the agent. We have also seen that although this fact fails to support explanatory individualism it makes the position of normative individualism very plausible. In fact, one of the reasons why nonindividualism might appear to be so implausible at first sight is because of the intrinsic plausibility of normative individualism. We have already seen

that there is no conflict between accepting even the position of explanatory nonindividualism (which allows that some of an agent's actions are explained by another person's pro-attitudes but not the agent's own pro-attitudes) and accepting the position of normative individualism (according to which it will be still possible to attribute some pro-attitudes to the agent, thus rationalizing the action). In this final section, I want to consider some further reasons that support our adherence to normative individualism, and that may lie behind a certain kind of prejudice against nonindividualism.<sup>41</sup>

Why do we resist the thought that there are any genuine nonintentional explanations of action? The reasons are not far to find. They lie in what we value in people. The picture of us as agents whose actions would be genuinely (irreducibly) explained nonintentionally is (by and large) not very flattering. Occasional politeness is one thing, but just imagine a housewife answering the question why she cleans the house, mends the socks, cooks the food, and so on, by (seriously) explaining that it is her social role as a housewife, and that the social role is a part of the on-going patriarchal order of things. There is something wrong (we think), even though many (and perhaps by now most) of us believe that the facts to which she would appeal are *true*, and are more than likely to indeed *explain* why she cleans house, mends socks, cooks food. So why is our explanation of her action not all right when she offers it? Why should not her saying it simply confirm our explanation?

Her explanation of her actions in terms of the patriarchal structure of the society is not all right because it is not the kind of explanation that *we want from her*. What kind of explanation do we want? G.E.M. Anscombe<sup>42</sup> was surely right — *we want to know her* reasons. While the factual claim that ordinary explanations of action always cite the *agent's* reasons is questionable, it seems nonetheless true that the reason why we find the housewife's sociologically sophisticated explanation hard to accept is that it does not give *her own* reasons to so act. To the contrary, it seems to offer reasons for her not to so act. After all, who would want to continue living in servitude?

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<sup>40</sup> "Cartesian Persons," in *Postures of the Mind*, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>41</sup> I say 'prejudice' in view of the fact that no reason that supports normative individualism is a reason for rejecting explanatory nonindividualism.

And it is here that we finally touch on the most important point. For why is it that what we want from the housewife is an explanation in terms of reasons, in terms of *her* reasons — for we would (hopefully) be just as dissatisfied if she explained her actions by appealing to her husband’s really wanting her to clean house, mend socks, cook food? After all, we have a perfectly good explanation in sociological terms, and a really powerful one, for it explains not only one individual action but the whole tendency of women to stay at home and perform house duties (despite their potential dislikes and aversions). (No assembly of reason-explanations could claim to carry so much explanatory power.) The reason why we want an explanation in terms of reasons is not so much that we think of ourselves as creatures that *do* act on our own reasons, as that acting on our own reasons is what we *value*, that we think of ourselves as creatures that *should* act on our own reasons. A person who always can give good reasons for her actions, whose reasons make up a systematic whole, who is not easily swayed by interpersonal and social pressures, who exhibits autonomy and integrity, has, as we honorifically say, a personality, or is a *person* or an *individual*. Acting on one’s own reasons is an ideal to which we aspire, and to which we expect others to aspire as well — on pain of our not valuing and respecting them as much.

It is for this reason that queries that look like ordinary why-questions, allegedly seeking an explanation of action, play quite a different function in our ordinary discourse. “Why did you do this?” when uttered in most circumstances does not necessarily seek an explanation of the action. For an explanation of action need not be offered in terms of reasons, while this is exactly what is expected in answer to the question. We might call such questions “challenges,” for they do not so much inquire after the best explanation of someone’s action (explanations in terms of social roles and structures are among the best) as they challenge the agent to give her reasons for performing the action. They are challenges because in case of failure to offer adequate reasons, we will be *prima facie* justified in not treating the agent as a personality, in respecting her less.

In the picture that emerges, there are two levels to our understanding of the concept of action and the discourse surrounding it. On the first (“base”) level, our actions

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<sup>42</sup> *Intention, op. cit.*

are explained by a variety of factors, which are reflected in the way in which we (disengagedly<sup>43</sup>) explain our actions. On the second (“superstructure”) level, agents are required to present their own reasons for their actions; the agent’s inability to do so might then be sanctioned by our less respectful attitudes toward him. Our reasons-discourse is thus not as friendly as it might appear at first sight. We continually challenge one another’s conduct. But this is partially compensated by the great deal of charity we exhibit in our ways of thinking about actions. The very way our agentic language functions is geared toward making the individual appear in the best light vis à vis his independence of others, his strong will. Let us have a cursory look at some evidence for this suggestion.

Consider the ambiguity we have noted in rebutting the argument from breakdown cases. We will remember that we are notorious for confusing the lack of a pro-attitude with the presence of a con-attitude. There is a good pragmatic reason why this equivocation has survived: a form of words that allows us to inform others of lacks of attitude is simply not very useful since there are just too many attitudes that we lack. But whatever the reasons for its survival, we should inquire into the significance that its survival has. Perhaps the reader will not be surprised to learn that the equivocation plays a profound role in helping us aspire to the ideal of a person. How so?

Consider the law of excluded middle as applied to the having of a pro-attitude. It is presumably true that:

(LEM) for any action, either it is the case that the agent wants to perform it or  
it is not the case that the agent wants to perform it,

More idiomatically:

(lem) for any action, the agent either wants to perform it or does not want to  
perform it.

Our slick equivocation allows one to render (lem) as the false (PPA):

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<sup>43</sup> In contexts where the question of respect does not arise or is subdued. For instance, this will happen if one tries to explain someone else’s actions (his or hers, not yours or mine), or in settings where people trust each other, or where the actions involved do not carry much significance — politely moving over on a

(PPA) for any action, the agent either has a pro-attitude toward performing it or the agent has a con-attitude toward performing it.<sup>44</sup>

We might call this rendition of (LEM) the principle of polarization of attitudes, for what it licenses us to do is to attribute to the agent *some* attitude (whether pro- or con-) for *any* action. This is important for in view of the ideal to which we aspire, the worst that could happen is if the agent had no attitude, was indifferent. — You ate spinach, so you must have liked it, because had you not liked it you would not have eaten it; you did not eat spinach — so you must have disliked it, because had you liked it you would have eaten it.<sup>45</sup> The possibility of your having simply eaten the spinach, without having shed one thought, like or dislike, vanishes under the universal reign of (PPA). (PPA) makes sure that you stand behind your actions, that your attitudes *reflect* your actions.

While this ambiguity is helpful in supplying you with attitudes you might not have had, and so forms an integral part of the charitable discourse, ambiguities are not usually free and give rise to various kinds of troubles and tensions. Such is the case also here. The most common type of conceptual tension is that our intentional vocabulary sometimes stands in the way of our describing phenomena we are quite familiar with. Let us mention three of them: altruism, weakness of will, and servitude.

Perhaps the most famous conceptual tension lies behind the debate between those who believe that we are capable of altruistic actions and those who believe that we are not. Although much more is involved, one argument nicely summarizes the issue:

With regard to altruism, the ... intuition is that since it is I who am acting even when I act in the interests of another, it must be an interest of mine which

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bench (just because someone asks) is something we understand, but politely killing someone (just because someone asks) is not something we understand.

<sup>44</sup> Matters are slightly more complicated. A con-attitude toward performing an action *A* can be interpreted as a pro-attitude toward performing a (negative) action not-*A*. Thus, excluded middle holds for any (positive or negative) action: for any *A*: the agent either wants to perform *A* (has a pro-attitude toward performing *A*) or does not want to perform *A* (lacks the pro-attitude toward performing *A*); for any not-*A*: the agent either wants to perform not-*A* (has the con-attitude toward performing *A*) or does not want to perform not-*A* (lacks the con-attitude toward performing *A*).

<sup>45</sup> Of course, it is possible for you to offer *another* reason (like the fact that you did not want to be rude), i.e. to exhibit another attitude, but exhibit an attitude you must.

provides the impulse. If so, any convincing justification of apparently altruistic behavior must appeal to what *I* want.<sup>46</sup>

The very attempt to formulate what an altruistic action is, viz. action done for the sake of another, seems doomed because we must understand the action as done because of what the agent wants or intends. (After all, had he not wanted to...) And if so then his action must be conceived as furthering the agent's end (even if that end will be to further another's end), and must ultimately be conceived not as an altruistic action as might have been thought but as an egoistic one. The paradox of altruism is interesting because it arises out of nowhere, out of the very way that the vocabulary functions, and yet contrary to the thoughts that are to be conveyed. Of course, one may take this fact to show that we indeed are egoists, or one may try to specify the kinds of wants that could be candidates for confirming that we are egoists. But one may also try to look back at the phenomena and juxtapose a greedy businessman and someone who stakes his life for the life of another. It is when one does the latter and hears someone insisting that both are egoists in *some* sense that Wittgenstein's diagnosis of our language sometimes going on a holiday seems the most appropriate. But it is more than a holiday. There is a deeper purpose that this function of the intentional language is designed to play, viz. to present the individual agent as autonomous master of his actions.

A similar tension has been involved in the conceptualization of the very phenomenon of weakness of will. When we imagine an akratic agent who resolves not to  $\phi$ , is fully motivated not to  $\phi$ , and then  $\phi$ s, we are almost immediately drawn into supposing that he must have wanted to  $\phi$  in some sense. (After all, had he not wanted to...) Perhaps a momentary desire to  $\phi$ , a momentary change of mind, governed his action, so that his action was not weak-willed after all. And indeed if one looks at particular cases of akratic actions, it is very tempting to reconstruct them in ways that turn the weak-willed into strong-willed actions. As a result, we are more confident in the existence of akrasia as a phenomenon than in the existence of particular instances of akratic actions. Once again, our skill in interpreting actions as strong-willed is remarkably consistent with our charity toward the individual.

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<sup>46</sup> Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 80-81.

One last example of a conceptual tension involves cases of undue influence of others on the agent. On one conceptualization of such cases, most of us have a tendency to respond with hostility if exposed to continued acts of malevolence on the part of another. However, there comes a point where if the acts of malevolence increase in intensity our tendency to respond with hostile actions becomes broken and we tend to respond with benevolent acts.<sup>47</sup> The telling examples here involve cases of people who have been “broken” (the best literary example being Winston Smith<sup>48</sup>): prisoners, soldiers, mental patients, women, slaves, subjected to mental, physical, and situational torture. When a person in such a situation behaves with benevolence toward her oppressor, we want to interpret the action as servile. But when we try to understand the action intentionally, the agent acting because she *wants* to be benevolent or even because she *wants* to be servile, the characterization of the action as servile seems threatened. It is almost as if we want to say that she is within her rights to do as she wants, and if *she* *wants* to behave in that way toward her oppressor that is *her* privilege. But if this is the psychological portrait of the agent then she seems to be a strong-willed person, not servile at all. Once again, the intentional explanation seems to turn around the intuitions that we harbor about the phenomena.

In these three cases, of altruism, of akrasia, and of enslavement, we see a tendency for intentional explanations of actions to falsify our intuitions about the phenomena. It is as if our intuitions are hard to express in intentional terms. That this is so is only to be expected if the very ways of our language were geared toward furthering the picture of ourselves as autonomous, strong-willed, independent agents. In truth, we do not always conform to this picture, or perhaps even only rarely do so. We do things out of habits, on others’ orders and expectations. Of course, this is not to say that we

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<sup>47</sup> L. Nowak, *Power and Civil Society*, *op. cit.* and “Man and People,” *Social Theory and Practice* 14 (1987), 1-17. Nowak suggests that aside from the relatively “normal” areas of human interaction where the agent responds with malevolence to malevolent actions and with benevolence to benevolent actions, there are two “abnormal” areas: of enslavement, where the malevolence of the other is sufficiently large that the agent responds with benevolence, and of satanization, where the benevolence of the other is sufficiently large that the agent responds with malevolence. His model is indirectly confirmed by constituting the foundation for his general theory of real socialism.

<sup>48</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Harcourt, 1949).

never do things because we want to do them; just that we do not always do things because we want to do them (under whatever description).

Since our practices (including the relevant linguistic practice) are geared toward being most charitable to the individual, to making him appear in the best possible light, we can at least understand why the intentional categories seem inescapable. This is because the intentional categories are inescapable for us in most of our interactions with others — because the way that our intentional categories function is geared toward the greatest charity to the individual and his point of view.

But one might wonder why that is so. So far, it looks as if our individualism is a cultural phenomenon, specific perhaps only to our cultural milieu. However, one might, with some right, think that individualist theories of action explanation, in more or less explicit ways, have a genuine claim to universality. But if this is so, if different cultures to a greater or lesser extent privilege the individual's perspective, then such consistent privileging must seem like a cosmic coincidence from our point of view. Indeed, the question why this is so is among the most difficult, and it will be hard to do justice to it here. But let us glance at the answer.

The reason why the individual and the individual's perspective is so privileged in our thinking about action is the fact that the nature of action is nonindividualist. What actions are is frequently determined by circumstances external to the agent. This is so in what we call unintentional action, where the agent is forced to recognize an entirely unintended deed as his deed nonetheless. Intentionalists will claim that this is all right and shows little because although the agent does not intend *that* deed (does not intend to perform the action under *that* description), he nonetheless does intend some other deed (intends to perform the action under some other description) which, on the occasion, happens to be identical with the unintended one. However elegant, this attempt to accommodate unintentional actions as intentional actions under other descriptions obliterates something very fundamental to agency. For being an agent, first and foremost, involves *taking responsibility* for what one does or does not do and for what happens as a result of one's doing or not doing. But taking responsibility is frequently at odds with one's intentions, and with one's (fore)knowledge of the consequences. This is very clear in what one might — from this point of view — see as a paradigm of our

agentive involvement with the world: in unintentional omissions. When one simply fails to show up at a meeting with one's friend, perhaps because one forgot in the rough and hectic time, perhaps because one was so tired that one simply fell asleep and missed it, one *does* something that affects one's friend — one wastes his time in the very least, perhaps upsets him as well. One is rightly held responsible for doing so. And one is rightly expected to recognize it as something one did by taking and acknowledging responsibility for it — whether by apologizing or by excusing oneself.

If this indeed is the angle from which we ought to look at agency then what will be noted immediately is that the individual does not hold a prominent position in determining what counts as an action of his, in determining for what he may be held responsible. When one sleeps sweetly after a hard day, it seems almost silly to think that one can *do* something (*perform* an action) at the time — and a nasty one at that, of wasting a friend's time. And yet, the friend's time *is* wasted. And not by chance, but by one's carelessness. It is the recognition of the way in which we affect the world, in particular the social world, that constitutes the core of our idea of agency. As such, the very idea of action (as part of conduct) is not geared toward the individual but rather toward the *responsibility* the individual has toward others.

It will be equally obvious, however, that the very idea of action so understood will seem *unfair* to the agent. And it is to compensate for this that our *thinking* about agency is geared toward the individual and the individual's point of view. It is because the idea of action is geared toward others and the way that they are affected, that we try to make the individual look in the best possible light vis à vis his actions. It is because we require so much of the agent, because we require of her first and foremost to think about how others are affected (and if not to think about it then at least take responsibility for it), that it seems only fair then to take her point of view as central in our evaluating the action.

But if this is the case then, as theorists of action, the worst we can do is to become impressed by the apparent inevitability of our intentional understanding of actions. The worst guide for understanding the nature of action lies precisely in what we find inescapable in our understanding of it. For this urgency with which intentional categories swarm our picture of action is due to the fact that they must compensate for what we really take actions to be, for what they really are. The intentional picture of action

constitutes the best-intentioned false consciousness but a consciousness that is false nonetheless. And however painful it may be, as theorists of action, we must recognize that *our* primary obligation is to the truth not to the individual.

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The purpose of this chapter was to clear some of the initial resistance one might have toward the account of action presented in Chapters III-VI, as the account does not exclusively refer to the pro-attitudes of the agent, but also to the pro-attitudes of others, viz. their normative expectations of the agent. I have suggested that some of the resistance against such a view might stem from what I have called individualism about action explanation, i.e. the view that intentional explanations of action (that appeal to the agent's pro-attitudes) are privileged over nonintentional explanations of action (that appeal to the pro-attitudes of people other than the agent).

I have distinguished two kinds of individualist positions that may be advanced in a reductive or non-reductive spirit. First (non-reductive normative individualism), the individualist may assert that all of an agent's actions must be rationalized in terms of the agent's pro-attitudes. Second (non-reductive explanatory individualism), the individualist may make the stronger claim that all of the agent's actions may not only be rationalized but also explained in terms of the agent's pro-attitudes. Both positions may be advanced in a reductive spirit asserting in addition that only the agent's pro-attitudes may rationalize the agent's actions (reductive normative individualism), or that only the agent's pro-attitudes may explain the agent's actions (reductive explanatory individualism).

I have further characterized two different nonindividualist positions, declaring that the dissertation is written in the spirit of explanatory nonindividualism, which is incompatible with either version of explanatory individualism but is compatible with non-reductive normative individualism. My aim in this chapter has been accordingly to show that there are grounds to resist arguments that support explanatory individualism. In Chapter VII, I will argue for the tenability of an explanatory nonindividualism (by showing how it is possible to act on others' pro-attitudes). I will need to demonstrate that the explanatory relation proposed will obtain not only between an agent's expectations of

herself and her action but also that it can obtain between others' expectations of the agent and her action.

The discussion ought to have given some reason to reject the popular notion that any adequate account of action must appeal to intentions, beliefs, desires, in one form or another. In this way, the idea of a responsibility-based approach to action ought not to appear as intuitively foreign as it may have at first sight.