

COLLECTIVISM ON THE HORIZON: A CHALLENGE TO PETTIT'S CRITIQUE OF COLLECTIVISM*

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The interface between the social and the psychological realm is notoriously difficult to understand. Philip Pettit [22] helpfully distinguishes two issues: the vertical and the horizontal. On the horizontal, the question is whether human agents could exist without society. Atomists hold that there is nothing incoherent in the supposition of a solitary agent; holists think that our relations with others are constitutive of our nature as agents. On the vertical, the question is whether the existence of social regularities compromises our picture of ourselves as intentional agents. Individualists deny while collectivists affirm that social regularities challenge intentional psychology. Despite superficial affinities, these two groups of positions are independent of one another. In fact, Pettit advances the position of individualist holism.

What is at stake in the vertical debate between individualists and collectivists is the 'intentional image of ourselves as more or less autonomous subjects — as autarchical agents', 'the extent to which we are rational in the beliefs and desires we form, and rational in the actions we select in service to those beliefs and desires' [22, p. 111]. There are at least three ways in which our intentional autarchy can be thought to be compromised. The picture of us as autonomous agents can be thought to be compromised from below, by arguing that we are really subject to more basic (neurophysiological) regularities.¹ Our autarchy might be thought to be compromised from above by our being subject to social regularities. In fact, the bulk of Pettit's discussion focuses on two ways in which social regularities might undermine intentional ones. They might be thought to be mentioning forces that are more powerful than those mentioned in intentional regularities (the overriding thesis). Or, they might be thought to represent a deeper order in which intentional regularities are actualized (the outflanking thesis). Pettit argues extensively that social regularities cannot be thought to undermine our intentional psychology in either of these ways. Finally, the intentional picture might be thought to be compromised at its own level, as it were, by showing that we are not exclusively subject to intentional regularities.

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¹ This position is held by eliminativists. See, e.g., Churchland [7], Churchland [8], Stich [26]. Pettit challenges their arguments early on [22, p. 45ff]

For example, it may be argued that we succumb to influences by other people, which sometimes go against the grain of intentional regularities.

I will be concerned here only with the last way in which our picture of ourselves might be thought to be compromised. Pettit, in effect, dismisses such a challenge by suggesting that all the data which seem to speak against intentional psychology can be accommodated by it because intentional psychology is revisable. I will begin (§I) by arguing that the mere fact that intentional psychology is revisable does not immunize it from possible challenges. In §II, we will consider one possible version of such a challenge to the individualist (the nonindividualist interpretation of folk psychology), and in §III, we will explore arguments that may be thought to show that such a position is incoherent. I will not argue for such an interpretation of folk psychology (except to make it cease to appear unintelligible). Instead, I will try to show that the arguments purporting to show that the position is incoherent are inconclusive at best. This will suffice for the main aim of this paper. For it will show, contrary to Pettit's claims, that there is a conceptual room for a collectivist position, that individualism is not the only contender in the debate.

I. The Revisability Thesis

Before venturing into the discussion of challenges to individualism, Pettit discusses five issues which could, though as Pettit argues should not, be taken to support a collectivist position. He argues that these considerations are perfectly well accommodated by an individualist. Among them is the charge that intentional psychology cannot be true because there are phenomena which falsify it.

Pettit accepts that it is indisputable that the work by sociologists and social psychologists (he mentions Goffman's [15] frame analysis and Milgram's [19] experiments on obedience) points to the fact that we are subject to some regularities that frequently go against the grain of intentional regularities. Thus Goffman has argued that people have a tendency to conform to frames of interaction even at the cost of frustrating their desires. Milgram's experiments show with cruel clarity the extent to which his (normal) subjects were ready to obey the experimenter's commands to administer (fortunately fake) fatal electric shocks to another person. And this, against the firmly held conviction of the evil involved in inflicting harm on another.

Such results have the tendency of shaking our faith in intentional psychology and so might seem to support a collectivist position. But Pettit argues that there is room for revision in intentional psychology. After all, the application of the apparatus of intentional psychology involves the notion of favorable conditions. Its distinctive claims, e.g. the claim that we act on our beliefs and desires, hold only under normal conditions. There is conceptual room for

deviations from the norm when perturbing conditions are present. Accordingly, Pettit argues, results such as those of Goffman or Milgram, do not compromise our picture of intentional agency. They merely point out circumstances which we could not consider as normal. Moreover, because intentional psychology is revisable, it stands to be enriched rather than challenged by such discoveries.

While this is one way of understanding the significance of such results, Pettit does not so much as mention an alternative way of looking at them. One might raise the question *why* such (and possibly other) findings *ought* to be included among the disturbing conditions rather than taken as a reason to change our idea of what happens in normal circumstances. Indeed, while it is arguable that Milgram's experiments, for instance, do identify certain factors which could be considered as disturbing a normal intentional regularity,² this is *prima facie* a less plausible interpretation of Goffman's theory. Goffman seeks to analyze our everyday experience as exhibiting the structure imposed by frames of interaction. For him, the normal conditions are those where frames of various kinds exist and shape our actions, whereas the perturbing conditions are those that disturb the normal operation of frames. And, as Pettit points out, agents operating within frames act according to appropriate expectations and rules pertinent to the frames, not according to their beliefs and desires, in fact frequently against them. So, the most natural reading of Goffman's theory is precisely as revising the individualist conception of what happens under normal conditions. Another example of a theoretician who has proposed to revise our conception of what happens under normal conditions is Nowak [21]. His theory is particularly interesting because he argues that the rational-intentional picture of ourselves cannot underwrite a macro-social theory of socialism.

In view of these examples, Pettit's claim that counter-intentional phenomena cannot challenge intentional psychology is suspect. Since he offers no reasons against thinking that the collectivist might challenge the individualist conception of what happens under normal conditions, the strategy of simply accommodating adverse evidence seems somewhat *ad hoc*, leaving the resulting embellished theory open to the charge of emptiness.

II. Individualism, Nonindividualism and Folk Psychology

To forestall the possibility of revising the individualist conception of what happens in normal circumstances, the individualist would have to claim that there is something conceptually incoherent about such a proposal.³ In the present

² This indeed is Milgram's own position in [19].

³ This admittedly strong position would *ensure* that the individualist conception of folk psychology is the only one available. Since Pettit seems to think so, I'll assume that he is committed to the

section, I will first briefly sketch an outline of a nonindividualist interpretation of folk psychology which revises the individualist conception of what happens in normal circumstances. In the next section, we will then consider some arguments that might be taken to show that such a view is incoherent.

1. *The Nonindividualist Interpretation of Folk Psychology*. While revisions of the individualist understanding of what happens in normal circumstances might take many shapes, I propose to simplify our discussion by pointing to one type of phenomenon: acting on others' desires. Our ordinary practice of explaining actions includes aside from explicitly intentional explanations (citing the agent's desires) also explanations that are nonintentional (cite another person's desires).⁴ Some nonintentional explanations are, or are underwritten by, intentional explanations (sometimes the agent desires to fulfill the other person's desire). The issue between the individualist and the nonindividualist concerns the extent to which this is the case for all nonintentional explanations. The individualist holds that all nonintentional explanations are underwritten by intentional ones; the nonindividualist rejects this universal claim.

Let us look at two examples first. Suppose John wants to win his boss's favors. When he is asked to lend him his car, he gladly does so. Why does John lend his car? Because his boss asked him for it and John wanted to please him by fulfilling the request. This is a case of a nonintentional explanation that is underwritten by an intentional one. Consider another case. Suppose you sit on a bench in a park immersed in reading a book. Someone comes by and asks you to move over a little. You do so barely lifting your eyes from the book. Why did you move over? Because the person asked you to. Did you want to fulfill the person's request? It is not immediately clear, or at least it is not as clear as it was in the former case.

The *individualist* reconstruction of folk psychology ('intentional psychology') contains among many of its platitudes the thought that in normal conditions people act on their desires. The *nonindividualist* reconstruction of folk psychology substitutes this thought with a weaker one: in normal conditions

strong position that any nonindividualist interpretation of folk psychology is incoherent. It is, of course, conceivable that an individualist might endorse a weaker claim. Rather than arguing that it is the only possible position, he might argue that it is the best one. But on this weaker position, the success of the individualist conception is not to be settled on conceptual grounds and depends on empirical evidence. As such, both the individualist and collectivist positions are contenders subject to future investigation. And this is not Pettit's understanding of the state of the debate.

⁴ I propose here to limit the nonindividualist case to the suggestion that we can act on other people's desires and not that we can act on other people's beliefs. The consideration of the latter position would be too complex for present purposes.

people sometimes act on their desires and sometimes (within the context of the right kind of interpersonal interaction) on other people's desires. In other words, the proposal enriches our understanding of ourselves by suggesting that it is quite normal (in the *ceteris paribus* sense of 'normal') for people to act on others' wishes, demands, expectations (whether the individuals in question have appropriate desires or not), just as it is normal for people to act on their own wishes, intentions, expectations (whether others want them to so act or not).

But, one might observe, the individualist understanding of folk psychology is not incompatible with the thought that we can act on others' desires. We can if we so desire. The individualist conception of folk psychology is reductionist in the following sense. In so far as it allows that we can act on others' desires, it is committed to claiming that it is only because we act on some desire of our own that is suitably related to the desire of the other person. The nonindividualist conception of folk psychology, on the other hand, is non-reductionist in this respect. It allows that while we can act on our own desires, and while we sometimes act on our own desires that are suitably directed toward other people's desires, we can also act on another person's desire without (thereby) acting on any desire of our own. It may be helpful for the sake of contrast to add another reductionist position to the inventory: *anti-individualism*. According to the anti-individualist, we normally act on others' desires. In most cases where it appears to us that we act on our own desires, we actually act on someone else's desire.

Admittedly, the nonindividualist understanding of folk psychology does not appear too inviting at first glance. This first impression is dictated by the overwhelming popularity of the individualist interpretation of folk psychology.⁵ However, as far as the actual practice of folk psychology is concerned, the nonindividualist interpretation is just as if not more natural than the individualist interpretation of it. If we look at cases of mundane everyday interaction, the explanation of actions performed by one person in terms of another person's desire, expectation, or request seems more than natural. A child goes to bed because her mother wants her to. When a person sitting at a table is asked for salt by another, she responds almost automatically, without disturbing her conversation or consulting her desires. In a rescue operation, where the coordination between crew members is vital, the command of a person is followed by the appropriate action by another in a split-second, leaving us with little inclination to explain the action in terms of the agent's desire (rather than the

⁵ The individualist interpretation of folk psychology is almost universally held among philosophers. There are notable exceptions: Baier [3], Nowak [21], von Wright [27].

command).⁶ Although, in all these cases, the individualist will find space to attribute desires to the agent despite our evident lack of inclination to do so, it is worth emphasizing that if we were to take our practices at face value, the nonindividualist picture of folk psychology would appear quite natural.

It may pay to be reminded of Dennett's [13] distinction between two levels at which folk-psychological concepts are used: subpersonal and personal. 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' desires do not require the involvement of the agent's desire (if the desire-talk is understood at the personal level) and yet allow the subpersonal investigations of cognitive psychology to postulate desire-like states on the part of the agent.

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, and indeed Pettit reminds us of such an argument himself, that the evolution of human beings favored and selected rational behavior. Humans who were able to conduct themselves in rational ways were better off than those who were not. Since rational conduct involves belief desire satisfaction, this gives one reason to believe that humans will, in normal conditions, be rather good at satisfying their beliefs and 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 advantage of another kind of conduct — conformism. It has been argued that there is a distinct evolutionary benefit for us to conform (Boyd and Richerson [6]). 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

⁶ These cases are merely meant to evoke a certain picture. They should not be seen as 'proving' nonindividualism. In particular, Pettit is likely to invoke the idea of the difference between a background and foreground in acting and argue that the desires are necessary in the background (Pettit and Smith [23]). The very idea of a background of action is from the point of view of a nonindividualist interpretation of folk psychology, a symptom of a theoretical maneuver to save the individualistic interpretation.

selectional advantage of conformism — of our acting not on our own minds but rather on other people's minds.⁷

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 desires and sometimes on others' desires 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' desires (in normal conditions) are reducible to actions done on the agent's desires, the individualist in effect gives priority to one of the prongs in the evolutionary story. This would be understandable if there were a 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 desires, in normal conditions) or for being an *anti-individualist* (and preferring the nonindividualist prong, conceiving of all actions as done on others' desires, 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 the *nonindividualist* (in contrast to the anti-

⁷ 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 §III.2).

individualist) thought that we sometimes act on our own minds and sometimes on those of other people.

III. Is the Nonindividualist Interpretation of Folk Psychology Incoherent?

If the nonindividualist understanding of folk psychology is incoherent then Pettit's failure to consider a collectivist challenge of the sort we are proposing (as revising the individualist understanding of what happens under normal conditions) would be at least partially vindicated. It may appear at first sight as if there are strong reasons for thinking that the nonindividualist interpretation of folk psychology is incoherent. The aim of this section is to show that they are inconclusive.

1. *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 intentional attitudes as internal states of an agent.⁸ 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 intentional attitudes may be relevant to the agent's performing the action, the agent's intentional attitudes are necessarily involved, for they cause the very event in question. To deny the involvement of the agent's intentional 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 intentional attitudes as internal states and actions as events caused *inter alia* by the agent's internal states, so it is customary to understand our attributions of intentional attitudes as part of a holistic attempt to understand an agent's behavior. (And whether or not this is customary, Pettit subscribes to all three positions.) According to this last position, any particular internal state of a person counts as the agent's desire that *p*, for example, only insofar as an attribution of a desire 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 desires. In other words, the identification of our intentional attitudes presupposes a certain understanding of our folk psychology (Davidson [10], Dennett [11, 12]).

At this point, then, the nonindividualist must claim that the proposed revision of our understanding of folk psychology will affect the very identification

⁸ There are important exceptions, among them: Baker [4], Dennett [11, 12], Hornsby [17]. The point of the argument survives even if one does not identify intentional attitudes with internal states as long as intentional attitudes are conceived to be causally efficacious states of the agent.

of our intentional attitudes. If we allow at the outset that aside from acting on their own desires, people also act on others' desires, then we might seek the maximization of our understanding of a person's action not by attributing a desire to that person but rather by attributing a desire 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.⁹

But if this is so, then a nonindividualist can also uphold all three customary positions. He may hold the customary view that intentional attitudes are internal states. He may hold that actions as events are caused *inter alia* by the agent's internal states. And he may hold that intentional 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 desires since not all internal states of the agent are the agent's desires. Only those states of the agent that we would have holistic reasons to understand as desires are desires. 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 desires.

2. *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 desires) there must be an intentional explanation of the action (mentioning some desire 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 desire) 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

⁹ 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 are Milgram's experiments (see Gibbard [14]). 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 desires) 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 desire, 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 desire against her own.

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 desire 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 not an 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.¹⁰ 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

¹⁰ 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., Belnap and Perloff [5]).

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 must be an intentional one because it skids 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 intentional attitude. The theory offers no insight into what happens when the agent *lacks* an intentional attitude.¹¹ So, the argument from breakdown cases not only does not but could not show that an intentional explanation must accompany any nonintentional explanations. Since the argument does not prove that it is necessary to invoke an agent's desire to explain her action, it does not show the nonindividualist interpretation of folk psychology to be incoherent.

3. *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 any desire to perform the action. Or, at any rate, we must not suppose on such grounds that the agent must have had a desire when performing the action. Recently, Michael Smith [24, 25] 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 [24, p. 55]:

- (1) Having a motivating reason *is, inter alia*, having a goal
- (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 others a desire. We will see that even if this argument is sound, it does not tell us *whose* desire must be included in the

¹¹ One could argue that while intentional regularities indeed allow us to predict only what the agent would do if he had some intentional 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.

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.¹²

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 ϕ with 'that state of a subject that grounds all sorts of his dispositions: like the disposition to ϕ 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)' [24, p. 52].¹³ 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 α 's desire to ϕ with the state of α that grounds α 's dispositions to ϕ in C , ψ in C' , so we might identify β 's desire that α ϕ with that state of β that grounds all sorts of α 's dispositions to ϕ in C , to ψ 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'. It is indisputable that 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.

¹² Of course, there has to be some explanatory connection in play, see below.

¹³ The original formulation is misleading since it does not allow erroneous beliefs. A desire to ϕ (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 ψ (drink petrol and tonic). Smith corrects it in [25, p. 113].

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

α 's desire that $\alpha \varphi$ is the state d of α that explains α 's
dispositions to φ in C , to ψ in C' ,

which implies, among other things, that were α not in d *ceteris paribus* α would not φ in C or ψ in C' . 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:

β 's desire that $\alpha \varphi$ is the state d' of β that explains α 's
dispositions to φ in C , to ψ in C' ,

which implies that were β not in d' *ceteris paribus* α would not φ in C or ψ in C' .¹⁴

It could be objected that Smith's theory commits us to the thought that even if in the case where β 's state is explanatorily involved, we need to interject α 's desire. How so? Well, presumably what β 's state explains is α 's dispositions. But for all these dispositions of α , there is going to be a state of α that is going to explain them. This state, on Smith's account, just is α '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 φ is naturally explained by some state of another person β , there is a level of explanation at which some state of the agent α explains α 's disposition to φ .¹⁵ 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

¹⁴ One could object at this point and argue that this is too liberal 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 desires directed to the agent's own actions. But this accidental focus on the desires 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.

¹⁵ Though, perhaps, one might be more wary in supposing that there is one state of the agent that explains all the relevant dispositions.

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 §III.1, 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.

4. *The Problem of the Explanatory Connection.* It may be worthwhile at this point to pause and address but cursorily a question that may be generating some skepticism in the background. What sort of explanatory connection can there be between the agent's action and another person's desire? What sort of connection there is between the agent's desire and his action can be clearly, if not uncontroversially,¹⁶ seen as causal.

Let us suppose, for simplicity, that the agent believes that the other person desires him to do such and such. One questionable move at this point is to say that the agent does what he does *not* because of the other person's desire but *rather*

¹⁶ Cf. e.g., Collins [9], Wilson [28]. It is worthwhile noting that, as Wilson points out, it is *prima facie* less problematic to accommodate cases of acting on someone else's desire (not on one's own) if one adopts a teleological theory of the nature of the explanatory connection.

only because he believes that the other person desires him to do so.¹⁷ But if this is questionable,¹⁸ then what sort of connection can there be between the other person's desire and the agent's action?

It is clearly beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this issue in the detail it deserves. Instead, I want to ask a simpler question and give but a provisional answer. Why exactly could not the connection between the other person's desire and the agent's action be thought to be causal? Perhaps what is specifically worrisome about the causal involvement of another person's desire in the agent's action can be captured in a dilemma. On one horn, it may seem as if one person's desire is completely idle with respect to another person's action. Imagine, for example, that I want you to read *The Capital*. Such a desire of mine is causally mute, it has no force. On the other horn, if one allows the other person's causal influence to be less idle (as, for example, another person leading the agent's hand when signing a testament), one comes dangerously close to concluding that the action was not the agent's action at all, but rather the action of the person who had the desire (to inherit the agent's fortunes, for example).

But while one must acknowledge that both types of situations occur, there is no reason to treat them as horns of a dilemma: there is no reason to suppose that there are not many kinds of cases in between. There are many ways in which one person's desire may instigate another person to action. Commands are examples where one person's desire is put into action by another, and they can hardly be described as idle. So are requests, in many circumstances. At the same time, it is usually not the case that actions done on commands or requests are thought of as not the agent's but the commander's or requester's actions. The availability of some cases where the objectionable features do not occur gives some support to the thought that the questionable cases are not horns of a dilemma and that the possibility of a causal account of the explanatory relation is not eliminated by their presence. Such an account would, of course, have to explain what is wrong with both questionable cases. It would also have to be sensitive to the actions occurring in the context of the right kind of interaction, perhaps involving persons

¹⁷ The appeal of the argument derives from the thought that the agent's belief (about the other person's desire) screens off the effect that the other person's desire has. Recently, Baker [4, pp. 103-106] has argued that this argument cannot show that the desire is not explanatorily relevant. (Baker's arguments pertain to somewhat different explanations but they can be naturally extended to cover the cases of concern here.) She points out that the very same applies in ordinary cases of causal explanations. For example, a foot injury would be screened off as relevant to the resulting pain by a mediate state of the nervous system.

¹⁸ Note that the nonindividualist might still hold that the relation between the agent's belief and the action is causal. The only questionable move consists in taking it that the agent's belief will usurp supremacy over the influence of the other person's desire.

who have the right kind of history (are friends, members of a family) or the right kind of institutional status (superiors of a military). But this in itself does not speak against construing the efficacy of one person's desire that another do something as ultimately being causal in nature.

5. *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 desire 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 desire, 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. This, however, would require the proposal of an alternative theory of action, which is a task that cannot be undertaken here.¹⁹ Instead, I want to raise two points. First, I will sketch the general strategy of the nonindividualist conception of action. Second, I will raise a doubt that the argument at hand could be seriously advanced by an individualist of Pettit's persuasion.

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 agentive involvement (defeating conditions), and characterize actions as those performances of the agent that are produced in the absence of defeating conditions.²⁰ 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 intentional attitudes. On the latter strategy, an agent's raising

¹⁹ I offer a theory of action that is compatible with nonindividualism in my dissertation *Social Anatomy of Action*. The distinction between an action and a mere happening is made not in terms of what is intentional under a description but rather in terms of what it would have been reasonable to expect of the agent, where the concept of reasonable normative expectations is suitably understood.

²⁰ This strategy has its roots in Aristotle's characterization of voluntary action in terms of what is not involuntary (Aristotle [1], 1111a22-24), and has been pursued by contextualists (Hart [16], Melden [18]).

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 to drive a conceptual wedge between a performance being explainable by the agent's desires 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 desires does not count as a defeating condition, the threat to nonindividualism is averted. None of the remarks can possibly do justice to the force of the objection. Only the defense of a theory of action along the lines sketched, complete with an account rather than a list of defeating conditions, could do that. But the above remarks suffice to open a conceptual space for such a theory, and hence for a nonindividualist interpretation of folk psychology.

It may be worthwhile at this point to turn the dialectical table on Pettit. We will remember that he argues that folk-psychology is revisable. This means that adverse results such as our acting on others' desires (as evidenced by Milgram's experiments or Goffman's analysis) can be accommodated by the individualist interpretation of folk psychology as representing what happens under unfavorable conditions. But this move already limits the kinds of unintelligibility, which Pettit could think are exhibited by these cases. Cases of our *acting* on others' desires are unintelligible in that they cannot be explained in terms of the intentional regularities, but they are not unintelligible in other ways. Pettit does not claim that they are unintelligible in that the performance would not be an action, or that the desire would be mute. He seems satisfied with the intuitive position on the matter: these actions really take place, really because of others' rather than the agent's desires, and they are really actions.

6. *The Common-Sense of Nonindividualism.* The distinctive nonindividualist claim is then that we can act on others' desires just as we can act on our own desires. 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' intentional 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 desire to perform it. Second, he can consider them to be cases of the aberrant type, in which case the agent acts on another's desire 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 desire not against her desire but without having a desire of her own at all. (These are the cases which are conveniently obliterated by the ambiguity mentioned in §III.2.) Suppose that an agent rides in a bus, has no particular desire 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. There comes in a person 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 desires 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 desires need not be construed as coming into the foreground but may operate in the background (Pettit and Smith [23]). 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.

Moreover, the proposal that the relevant desires 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 desires 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 psychology 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 — it is of crucial importance in moral evaluation. But why should we in thinking about ourselves abstract from our ordinary interactions? As Annette Baier [2, pp. 89-90] reminds us, ‘My first concept of myself is as the referent of “you”, spoken by someone whom I will address as “you”.’

IV. Nonindividualism and Collectivism

One might reasonably wonder, however, how the nonindividualist interpretation of folk psychology is related to the vertical issue which concerns Pettit. Here is a form of argument that would link the collectivist’s specifically vertical concerns and the less vertical concerns of the nonindividualist. If it were to turn out that the nonindividualist conception of folk psychology tallies with various social-structural regularities better than does the individualist position this would constitute a reason to accept the former. Such an acceptance would compromise the exclusively intentional picture of us (in the way specified above) and would do so (in part) on vertical grounds. We can only speak here of ‘the form of the argument’ because the argument is open-ended. The reference to various social-structural regularities leaves it open, whether to theoretical or empirical investigation, which of the two interpretations of folk psychology will better fill the role.

One way in which this might happen is if a theorist who works with a conception that is at least congenial with an individualist conception of folk psychology (perhaps in the way in which the rational choice theory is) finds it necessary to change the conception by incorporating phenomena that would be readily understood in terms of the nonindividualist conception. Nowak’s [20, 21] proposal of the non-Christian model of human interaction fits this type of situation. But there might also be empirical considerations that may constitute reasons for favoring the nonindividualist psychology on vertical grounds. Consider, for example, the phenomenon of induction to the class of rulers. Only those individuals who exhibit an appropriate degree of strife for power remain in their roles as rulers. Such a selectional mechanism is compatible with the applicability of the individualist apparatus to the explanation of each individual action. However, the abandonment of the exclusively individualist psychology may offer us a better understanding of the phenomenon. Suppose a class of individuals is recruited to the ranks of rulers. Those individuals have certain predispositions toward gaining power. The claim is that those who have such

predispositions in a high degree will resist the selective pressures and stay on in power, those who do not will lose their status as rulers. What the addition of the nonindividualist interpretation of folk psychology allows us to understand is the possibility of those individuals who do not (on their own) have any particular desire for power to nonetheless act as they are expected to act, contrary to or independently of their own preferences. The addition of our tendency to conform adds another mechanism to the explanation. If this were the case then the turn-around among politicians would not be as great as one would otherwise expect. And this is a consequence that given appropriate controls could be tested.

In summary, I have argued that there is a route a collectivist might take that Pettit does not consider. In arguing that the individualist interpretation of folk psychology accommodates revision, Pettit does not allow for a position that would revise not the individualist conception of what happens under unfavorable conditions, but the very individualist conception of what happens in favorable conditions. A collectivist might adopt the nonindividualist interpretation of folk psychology. Although I have not offered a defense of such an understanding of folk psychology, I have rejected some powerful arguments aimed at showing its incoherence. Pending further support, such a position might hold more promise in understanding certain social phenomena than does the individualist counterpart. And perhaps, at least some among us will recognize a shape of our complex picture of ourselves in it. If so, the collectivist cause is not forlorn.

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