

# HOLISTIC ARGUMENTS FOR INDIVIDUALISM

Boris HENNIG<sup>1</sup>

Leipzig

Typoscript

## *Summary*

In this essay, I will sketch my view of the connections between some methodological assumptions in social philosophy, namely those of individualism, holism, and collectivism. My interest in doing so is to outline a rough conceptual landscape, into which an approach of collective actions and intentions can be placed.

The main result, which may seem somewhat surprising, is that the need for individualism can best be shown by a holistic argumentation. In order to show this, I argue that moral responsibility can only be undertaken by individual persons, and not by groups as such. This leads to an argument for individualism, which, however, has a holistic assumption as one of its premises. In order to act intentionally, it reads, a person must already have certain joint intentions and social attitudes, that she must be willing to eventually justify herself publicly for what she intends.

In the following, I will present two claims regarding the relation between holism and individualism. First, I will show that in a certain sense of these terms, it is possible to be both a holist and an individualist. In order to do this, I will introduce some rather formal and methodological distinctions. The [104] second claim concerns the *soundness* of being both a holist and an individualist. I will show that a certain kind of holism even implies individualism, given a further ethical demand.

## 1. *Holism need not be anti-individualistic*

### 1.1 *Two kinds of holism*

I begin with some remarks about the possibility of reducing collective agents to individuals or sets of individuals.

Individualism in social sciences is usually contrasted with holism and collectivism, which often seem to be understood as being roughly the same. However, I will soon draw a distinction between holism and collectivism, so that individualism can be better understood as the opposite of collectivism only.

Collectivism usually is associated with the following claim.

Collectivism. Collectives and collective attitudes neither are nor are reducible to sets of individuals or individual attitudes.

Holding the opposite of this stance, an individualist will maintain:

1. Thanks to Jesko Krispin Hennig, who contributed his very own part to this essay.

Individualism. In the end, collectives are nothing but sets of singular agents, and so for collective and individual attitudes. Indeed, a collective *should* be split up into its individual parts before it can be dealt with adequately.

This is a claim about whether there is a way to explicate a collective in terms of its individual members. Consider the sentence form “*we*<sup>2</sup> intend to do A”. According to individualism, the *we* is to be traced back to its members, the participating *me*’s. Such a reduction is successful if someone who already knows what an individual is, thereby also will come to know what a collective might be. Nothing so far is clear about the case [105] in which someone does not yet know enough about individuals. But can the notion of an individual be given independently of those of collectives and collective attitudes? In other words, even if a collective can be split up completely into individuals, the following two questions still remain open.

Is a reduction of collectives to individuals a satisfying explication of the former?

Can individual attitudes be explicated independently of any collectives of which the individual is a member?

That is, it may be that there is a way to reduce collective entities to individuals, which is nevertheless not a reduction of collectives to something *independent* of them.

Now comes the distinction between collectivism and holism. Whereas collectivism is the opposite of individualism, holism need not be so. It might be expressed by two slightly different claims:

Holism 1. The whole is more than the sum of its parts. That is to say, a *we* cannot be fully understood by investigating only the individual *me*’s into which it can be divided.

Holism 2. The entity in question is not understandable without reference to the whole which it is a part of. That is, even if a *we* could be split up completely into several *me*’s, this would not constitute a satisfying reduction of the *we* to something else. Rather, the identity of an *I* depends on the identity of the *we* which it is a part of.

Each of these claims should be associated with a different kind of holism. Let us call the first one ‘wholism’, for it is a claim about wholes. The second one is about individuals and their intelligibility, and it could be called ‘katholicism’, because of the meaning of *kat-holikos* as ‘related to the whole’. But since this term is already in use for matters of Christian religiosity, let us call it simply holism. Wholism thus states: a *we* is more than [106] the sum of participating *me*’s. Holism claims: No *me* is intelligible apart of some *we* it belongs to.<sup>3</sup>

As can now be seen, it is possible to be both individualist and kind of a holist. It is possible to maintain that collectives can or should be split up exhaustively into individuals, but to deny that this would be a reduction to something understandable independently of the collective. For although a *me* might not be intelligible apart from some *we*, the *we* could still be split up completely into some such *me*’s. Of course, such a reduction would not be a satisfying *explanation* of collectiveness. It would be only of help for people who already know what individuals are.

All this leads to the first of three claims I want to stress in this essay.

Claim 1. It is possible to be both an individualist and kind of a holist.

For individualism holds that a collective is to be split up into its individual members before it can be dealt with adequately. Holism, on the other hand, need not deny that this is possible and even sound. A holist will only add the remark that individuals in turn are not understandable apart from the collectives which they are members of. Thus a holistic

2. We, us, I and me are set in italics when I do not really mean me or us.

3. Cf. Tuomela, 1995, p. 115.

individualist may deal with collectives only insofar they are sets of individuals, but she<sup>4</sup> will not try to understand individuals outside and apart from these sets.

An obvious objection to this compromise between holism and individualism is the following. If every collective is to be divided into its individual parts, but these parts are only intelligible in relation to the collective, there does not seem to be anything intelligible left. For in order to investigate individuals, collectives must already be understood, and conversely. The answer to this objection is: What is to be investigated or understood is neither a collective nor an individual in isolation, but a [107] structured whole with its parts, a collective that consists of individuals. As far as I know, there is no need to understand unstructured collectives or isolated individuals.

In this terminology, the opposite of individualism is not wholism or holism, but collectivism. There may be opposites of wholism and holism, too. These would be the claims that either there is no *we* which would be more than a sum of *me*'s, which could be termed 'merism', or that there is an individual *I* understandable independently of the *we* which it is a part of. The latter might be called 'monism'.

An individualist is more of a merist. He wants collective agents to be described completely by a partitioned set, consisting of entities that are themselves indivisible. He need not be a monist, though, for he may accept that individuals cannot be dealt with in isolation.

### 1.2 External and internal individualism

Obviously, it is quite difficult to structure the field of inquiry in our case. Various labels have been attached to different kinds of individualism. An ontological individualism has been distinguished from an epistemic and a phenomenological one, and as regards phenomenological individualism, Kay Mathiesen has, in her contribution to this volume, introduced a further distinction between subjectivism and its opposite.

As regards intentions, two kinds of individualism have been distinguished in the literature, which have been labeled 'external' and 'internal'.<sup>5</sup> This has to do with the status of the collective entity that is claimed to be reducible. Taking a first look at a given intention, there are two logical subjects, Y and Z, which could be either collectives or individuals.

Y intends that Z does action A.

[108] Y and Z will usually be the same, as in "*We* will do A", explicated as "*we* intend that *we* do A". But even then there is one *we* that actually is the subject of intending, and another logically different *we* that is the subject of the intended state of affairs.

By analogy to modal semantics, the different subjects of intentions could also be called subject *de sensu* and *de rebus*. This terminology was introduced by Peter Abailard,<sup>6</sup> among others, to mark a distinction between two possible interpretations of sentences like the following:

My cat could be sitting on this mat now.

Imagine someone who has no living cat, but lost it some time ago. In one reading, then, the sentence is plainly false:

For my cat it is possible to sit on this mat now.

4. Throughout this essay, I use the female form to refer to both genders.

5. Cf. Gilbert, 1998 p. 236. See also [Searle:Construction] p. 26.

6. See Minio-Paluello, 1958.

Call the cat in this case the subject *de rebus*. There is a different reading:

It is possible that the situation obtains that my cat now is sitting on the mat.

That is, the cat might still be alive, and then it would be sitting on the mat. In this reading, the cat is subject *de sensu*. The subject *de sensu* is the ‘internal’ subject of the state of affairs that is said to be possible.

Other sentences are false when the grammatical subject is interpreted *de sensu*, though. Consider

My house could be bigger than it actually is.

Surely, it could have happened that the house in question had another size. But it could not be the case that “This house is bigger than it actually is”. So far for modal semantics.

[109] Let us now consider intentions again. Again, a simple intention has the following form:

Y intends that Z does A.

Y is the external subject *de rebus*, the one who actually has the intention. Z is the internal subject *de sensu*, for it marks the subject involved in the intended state of affairs. Four different kinds of simple intentions concerning *me* and *us* appear to be possible:

- (1) *I* intend that *I* do A,
- (2) *I* intend that *we* do A,
- (3) *we* intend that *I* do A,
- (4) *we* intend that *we* do A.

An external individualist now wants propositions (3) and (4) to be modified. The *we* in the beginning of both sentences is to be explicated in terms of individuals and their behavior. In contrast, an internal individualist will also want to reduce the second place *we* in sentences (2) and (4). So whereas for an internal individualist only the first sentence is acceptable in its own right, an external individualist holds that proposition (2) also expresses an irreducible case of intending.

Both the internal and the external individualism are phenomenological. When I speak of a subject *de rebus* referring to the external subject of an intention, this need not be an ontological commitment. Of course, as regards modal semantics, the opinions about this differ. But at least Abailard himself did not intend to refer to the ontological subject in contrast to a phenomenological or epistemic one, when he introduced his terminology. In order to see this more clearly, let me again refer to Kay Mathiesen. She introduces a distinction between the external subject, which she calls *intentional subject* or *mode of the intention*,<sup>7</sup> and the actual, ontological subject of intending. This makes a further differentiation possible. Taking the [109] ontological subject into account, an intention has the following formal structure.

X qua Y intends that Z does A.

In this formula, X refers to the ontological subject, the one in whose mind the intention occurs. Y is the phenomenological representation of this subject to itself as intending something. The introduction of the further entity X may be important for the question which subjects can be collectives and which not. Some theorists may claim that Y can be a

7. For the ‘mode’ of intentions cf. also Tuomela’s contribution to this volume, fn. 3.

collective, whereas *X* can only be an individual in the end, for only individuals have minds. That is, the following sentences will not be equally admissible:

- (3\*) *I* qua *we* intend that *I* do A,  
 (3\*) *We* qua *we* intend that *I* do A.

But this is an ontological question, and I will not deal with it here. For this reason, I will leave the nature of *X* aside.

### 1.3 Introducing *we*-intention

The attempt to explicate an external *we* in individualistic terms concerns sentences (3) and (4). It may lead to something like the following analysis:

Reduction 1a. *We* intend that *Y* does A iff  
 for some or all members  $x_1, \dots, x_n$  of *us*,  $x_i$  intends that *Y* does A, with  $0 < i < n$ .

In some cases, such an analysis will not be satisfying, though. For *us* intending A, it does not always suffice that some or all of *us* intend A separately and each on her own. Rather, *we* sometimes *jointly* intend that *Y* does A.

Reduction 1b. *We* intend that *Y* does A iff  
 some or all members of *us* intend jointly that *Y* does A.

[110] It is important to note that in this case, the action A need not itself be a joint action. What is done together in a stricter sense is only the act of intending.

A reduction of an internal *we* might look quite similar.

Reduction 2a. *Y* intends that *we* do A iff  
 $Y$  intends that some or all of *us* do A.

The relevant sentences are (2) and (4). As can be seen in sentence (2), the possibility to explicate the internal subject in individualistic terms is not specific to the matter of collective intentions. There are individual intentions with a collective as their internal subject as well.

(2) *I* intend that *we* do A.

This intention might be a highly private and individual attitude, and the question whether the *we* could be reduced to one or more *me*'s is a question about what *I* mean by *we* in this very case. In a rather harmless case, *I* mean all of *us* separately. It might be that *I* intend that *we* do A if and only if *I* intend that each of *us* does A. But again, an analysis such as reduction 2a will not always be satisfying. What is meant will rather be:

Reduction 2b.  $Y$  intends that *we* do A iff  
 $Y$  intends that members of *us* do A jointly.

Note that the discussion now has switched from subjects to actions. In order to overcome an unsatisfactory individualistic analysis, two strategies are open. First, the subject of intending could simply be declared irreducibly collective. That is, a reduction like 1b would not be possible at all. But in order to save the individuality of the subject while improving the analysis, one may also, as it were, put the collectiveness into the intending or acting. This is what I have just done.

Two different kinds of collectiveness in acting and intending have emerged so far. That is, two different actions can be said to be done jointly or separately: the act of intending and the intended action. This allows for a number of possible [112] combinations — 16, to be sure — of which the following ones are but examples.

- (i) *I* intend that each of *us* does *A* separately,
- (ii) each of *us* intends separately that *we* do *A* jointly,
- (iii) *I* intend jointly with others members of *us* that *I* do *A*,
- (iv) *we* intend jointly that *we* do *A* jointly,

...

Thus individualism, collectivism and both kinds of holism may have to do with quite a few different entities. The question of reducibility can be raised concerning each of them separately. Candidates for explication in individualistic terms can be the internal or external subject, the act of intending, or the intended act, not to mention the ontological subject of intending. These I shall call the five targets for individualistic reduction.

According to reduction 1b, the act of intending is done together by the members of the *we*. Following reduction 2b, the intended action is a joint one.

But there is a third way of stressing the jointness in intending. The first place *we* in sentences (3) and (4) may be replaced by terms that some individualists might find acceptable in the following way.

- (3') all or some of *us* we-intend that *I* do *A*,
- (4') all or some of *us* we-intend that *we* do *A*.

In these sentences, a *we*-intention is meant to be a kind of attitude different in nature from simple intentions. Technically speaking, both belong to some genus of  $\alpha$ -intentions, where  $\alpha$  can be an individual or a collective. Different kinds of examples for *we*-intentions have been given in the literature. For instance, two persons may jointly intend to carry a table upstairs. None of them can plausibly intend to do that on her own. In this case, the intended action is a joint one. Another example is that of two people going for a walk together, which is analyzed by Margaret Gilbert.<sup>8</sup> The intention to go for a walk together implies, as [113] Gilbert shows, certain normative attitudes of the walkers towards each other. For instance, if one of them stops or suddenly changes her direction, she is at least expected to inform the other. Here, both the intention and the intended action are joint. A third kind of example is presented by Seumas Miller.<sup>9</sup> In his scenario, two parties intend to dig a tunnel from *A* to *B*. Although for both parties it is possible to dig the whole tunnel alone, they agree to dig half of it each and meet in the middle. At least the agreement is a joint action and intended jointly in this case. The action of digging the tunnel is perhaps less shared.

Roughly, *we*-intentions seem to be more than mere aggregates of single intentions. The intention is rather to do something together in a coordinated manner. Sometimes it is also assumed that the act of *we*-intending is itself a joint action.

Taking this into account, the list of possible intentional attitudes could be doubled again by adding the following:

- (5) *I* we-intend that *I* do *A*,
- (6) *I* we-intend that *we* do *A*,
- (7) *we* we-intend that *I* do *A*,
- (8) *we* we-intend that *we* do *A*.

8. Gilbert, 1990.

9. Miller, 1995.

Some of these are rather theoretical possibilities, and they may not all make sense. For instance, it is not clear if the intention in case (5) still can be classified as a we-intention.

At least in this case, the notion of we-intention would better be replaced by 'joint intention', that is the joint act of intending. Sentence (5) would then have to be rephrased thus:

(5') *I* intend jointly with other members of *us* that *I* do A.  
etc.

Applied to all cases, this leads to a neat classification. [114]

	External	Internal
Action	Act of intending	intended action
Agent	subject or mode of intending	subject of intended action

There are two different kinds of subject matter concerning the matter of collectiveness: collective agents and collective actions. Both of them can occur outside or inside the scope of an intention, that is internal *de sensu* or external *de rebus*. The intending agent is the external subject, whereas the agent in the intended state of affairs is the internal subject, and so for the external and internal action. The external action is the intending itself, the internal one the intended action. The topic of we-intention then concerns nothing else but joint acts of intending.

For an individualist about actors it is still possible to be a collectivist concerning joint actions. Maybe actors can only be individuals in the end, but actions can be genuinely collective ones.

A reduction of an internal collective action will have the following formal structure.

Reduction 3. Y intends that Z does A jointly with others iff  
Y intends that Z does A in manner m under circumstances c.

Since intending can be classified as a special kind of acting, an attempt to explicate the collective attitude of joint intention in individualistic terms will have a very similar form.

Reduction 4. Y intends jointly with others that p iff  
Y intends that p in manner m under circumstances c.

The main task for a phenomenological individualist concerning actions and intentions seems to be the specification of the conditions c and the manner m, and of course of a theory of simple intention. Individualism of this kind does not deal with collective agents or subjects any more.

The thesis of an individualist about intending is that there is one simple kind of intention, that is individual intention, on the basis of which other kinds of intention such as joint intention or [115] we-intentions can be defined. The question is, then, whether individual intentions are such that they can be understood beforehand and whether joint intentions can be explicated using only individualistic concepts. For a holist, the answer should be negative to at least one of these questions. More precisely, a wholist would deny that joint intentions are built up, as it were, out of individual intentions only. She would hold that there is something in collective intending that is more than an aggregate of individual intentions. Holism concerning the relation of parts to the whole which they constitute, on the other hand, amounts to the claim that individual intentions are not understandable independently from joint ones.

As there are five possible targets for individualistic reduction, there may be corresponding targets for a holistic programme. First, a holist might want to establish the possibility or necessity of a *we* as an ontological subject of intending, independently and in advance of individual agents. Second and Third, the internal or external *we* might be declared irreducible, respectively. Further, she may hold that intended joint actions are not explicable in individualistic terms, and finally, she might want to show that there can and must be joint intentions independently and in advance of individual intentions.

A wholist concerning the act of intending might just want to say that joint intentions are irreducible to simple intentions. But a holist might also try her own kind of analysis by reversing the order of explanation. As a holist is of the opinion that individuals are only intelligible in relation to the whole which they are a part of, this analysis will go like the following:

Reduction 3'. Y intends that p iff  
Y jointly intends that p in manner m under circumstances c.

The same will go for collective agents and actions. So far, the holistic reduction 3' seems to be a highly theoretical possibility, arrived at only by sophisticated distinctions within methodology. What could be the sense in 'reducing' individual intentions to joint ones? [116]

## 2. *Holists should also be Individualists*

It seems that there is a theoretical possibility to be both a holist and an individualist. For instance, someone might be a phenomenological individualist concerning agents. That is, she might maintain that both the external and internal subject of intention are best understood if they are not dealt with as unanalyzed collectives. Instead, the subjects of the intention and of the intended state of affairs are to be explicated in individualistic terms and split up into individuals. But being a holist she would add that these individuals are only intelligible as parts of collectives, and not in isolation.

As regards intention and action, the case is similar. Although joint intentions might be only understood adequately if they are traced back to individual intentions, they need not be reducible to the latter in any strict sense. Rather it is only on the background of joint action that individual intentions can be understood. I will explain now, why this is so.

I will look for an argument in favor of reduction 3'. The question is why individual intentions should be introduced using the notion of joint intention, rather than conversely. A joint intention is at least a social attitude. That is, someone has a joint intention only if she has an intention while having the actions or reactions of other persons in mind. It remains to be said, first, why every singular intention must be a social attitude, and secondly, why intending presupposes the special kind of social attitude, joint intention.

The underlying idea is, roughly, that individuality stems from the ability to undertake responsibility.

### 2.1 *What is it like to be committed?*

As responsibility is one of the key notions in the remaining part of this essay, a few words are in order about the sense in which I want it to be used here.

[117] First, it is useful to distinguish moral and causal responsibility. What matters here is the former, that is a category in the space of reason and rational action. The question of causal responsibility, on the other hand, is a rather physical one.



Further, there are two kinds of moral responsibility. Most often, people are held responsible for the causation of damage *after* they have acted in a certain way. This kind of responsibility is attributed to actors by other actors only *post hoc*. But actors also willingly undertake responsibility for actions yet to be done. This kind of responsibility, which is undertaken by actors in advance of their acting, seems more basic to me. It is only because an actor licenses accusations about the way she behaves in advance of her acting, that people can effectively accuse her afterwards. An actor acts responsibly in the relevant sense only if she acts with the intention of eventually justifying her behavior.

Finally, I understand without further ado that responsibility is in principle a social attitude. To feel responsible for an action A is always to do A with some social group, real or imagined, in mind. The reason for this is that no person can justify her actions without justifying it in some way publicly. No one can feel responsible without knowing what it is to act together with other actors, and the most important of these joint actions is justification itself.

Claim 2. Responsibility is a social virtue. Therefore, no one can behave responsibly in radical isolation from real or imagined social groups.

What is it like, now, to be committed? What kind of beings can possibly be responsible? Let me first answer a slightly different question. What is someone committed responsible for? The best possible answer seems to be: for her decisions. The second best might do as well: for actions. In order for something to be a decision or an action of someone, the decider or actor must have had the possibility of having done or decided otherwise. For a start, it seems that only actors or deciders can bear responsibility.

[118] Basically, no one can be committed unless she is a persistent person. To some degree, everyone we take to be responsible must be identifiable over time, and in addition must identify herself as the same over time. She must be of some integrity, at least in order to recognize her own past and future commitments as such.

Further, a responsible person cannot be almighty. Intuitively, a decision must always be a decision against some alternative, and so only finite creatures can decide in a proper sense. It also seems that for a responsible person, it must be possible to be harmed. No one can be *accused* effectively, if she is not herself susceptible to harm.

In order to be responsible, one must be free in a certain sense. One must be able to ground a decision or action on reasons instead of brute necessities. Thus a responsible person must be able to act for reasons.

But being committed is more than being able to act freely. Someone committed or responsible must, intuitively, feel somewhat obliged to respond to certain demands. In order to be willing to respond to a demand, one must be open for it.<sup>10</sup> Obviously, no person would count as responsible, unless we had reason to assume that she herself *wants* to be a person of integrity. A responsible person must feel subject to the basic demands of morality: integrity, sincerity and persistence. She must want to be herself. Instead of seeking shelter in anonymity, she must be willing to stand by her deeds.<sup>11</sup>

Rather literally, to be responsible presupposes the ability to respond in some way. That is, in order to be responsible, one must be addressable, and be able to reply somehow. This kind of dialogue might occur without the use of any spoken language. But it clearly will be a joint social action. Responsibility thus rests on the ability to respond, and that means in the widest possible sense: it presupposes the ability to take part in communication, that is group action.

10. This is perhaps what Locke wants when he identifies persons via their moral consciousness. See Locke, 1979 II,xxvii,19.

11. Cf. Heidegger, 1986, §§ 54-58.

[119] Most importantly in this context, only individuals can bear responsibility. No entity that can be divided into further beings can be taken to be responsible. We ascribe commitments only to persistent unities, because we want to be sure that we will deal with the very same entities in the future. Responsible persons must be reliable, that is, they must not dissolve eventually into individual parts of them. Or at least, we will then better take these very parts to be responsible. This is what we do when we deal with collectives: in the end, we ascribe their commitments to some or all of its members.

## 2.2 *The case for individualism*

So it seems plausible that only individual persons, not collectives as such, can be held morally responsible.<sup>12</sup>

One reason for this is that moral responsibility must be suable, as it were. A collective can only be punished insofar its members are punished, otherwise the punishment will not be *felt*. In order to be held responsible for an action, an agent must be identifiable as a person, and she must be susceptible to harm. Only individual human beings fulfill these requirements sufficiently. So, collectives have to be split up into their individual members for matters of moral judgment.

But it is not only the interest of dealing with collectives in matters of morality that forces the observer to focus on individual persons. The members also have a similar interest in the collective which they constitute. A member of a social group wants to be involved in the decision-making and acting of the group she belongs to. As for this interest, one could distinguish despotic collectives from democratic ones. A democratic group respects the will and only the will of its members. A despotic group is, as far as concerns its actions and decisions, indeed holistic, but in an unpromising way. Its decisions and actions will be grounded on more than the interest of its members. A [120] member of a despotic group will thus not be able to stand in completely for the actions and attitudes of her group.

To be sure, there are despotic groups, and perhaps certain fields of social action can only be dealt with by admitting their existence and understanding their functioning.<sup>13</sup> But to evaluate a despotic collective morally will always be at least very difficult. So it is again for sake of moral judgment that individualism is in order. Let me summarize these suggestions.

Claim 3. Only individuals can be held morally responsible.

Put slightly differently, the ability to undertake moral responsibility seems to presuppose personhood. If this is correct, it seems to be in the first place an argument against collectivism. But I would like to draw attention to the social nature of responsibility itself. For a start, consider the following thesis as a fact:

Thesis. The ability of Y to undertake responsibility presupposes and therefore implies the individuality and personhood of Y. Conversely, only responsible actors can be individual persons.

If this is correct, it can be seen how a holist might maintain that we-intentions or joint intentions are prior to simple intentions. I think it is plausible that the undertaking of responsibility, being a social attitude, is only possible in connection with joint action. That is, part of reduction 3' would have to be spelled out thus:

12. Cf. Downie, 1969. See also Seumas Miller, in this volume, who seems to deny that corporations as such can be morally blamed.

13. Luhmann, 1995 has been especially concerned with despotic collectives, which he calls autopoietic.

Presupposition 1. Y intends that p only if  
Y is willing to undertake moral responsibility for p.<sup>14</sup>

That is, responsibility is a necessary precondition for intending. And as I have shown, the ability to undertake responsibility in turn presupposes individuality. [121]

Presupposition 2. Y is able to undertake moral responsibility for p only if  
Y is an individual person.

Therefore, intending cannot occur in radical isolation. Responsibility is an attitude towards other agents, imagined or real, within some shared social framework. But as the thesis states, no one is an individual person unless she is at least able to undertake responsibility. Indeed, personhood is not much else but the possibility to be addressed as a responsible actor. So the holist might claim that responsibility, being a special kind of *we*-attitude, is presupposed by every simple intention.

Let me now gather the various claims that I have made explicitly in the course of this essay.

Claim 1. It is possible to be both individualist and kind of a holist.

Claim 2. Responsibility is a social virtue.

Claim 3. Only individuals can be held morally responsible.

These claims seem to license the following implication.

Conceptual link. Membership in a collective implies and presupposes individuality.

On the basis of this implication, another one would also be valid:

If actor Y has intentions jointly with others, then she also must have her own individual intentions.

The reasons for this are the following. Joint intentions are social attitudes and they presuppose either the existence of a *we* that is the subject of the intention, or the membership of the subject in a real or imagined collective. Thus *we*-intentions are at least social attitudes: attitudes of a collective or attitudes regarding a collective. But only individual persons, that is responsible actors, can be said to have social attitudes, and only individuals can be held morally responsible.

[122] Thus holism need not lead to the claim that individualism is incorrect. On the contrary, individualism is a necessary presupposition implied by holism. Holism supplies the reasons for the very soundness of an individualistic stance in social sciences.

But the holistic argument for individualism is not based on empirical and logical facts only. What makes individualism sound and necessary is in the first place an ethical consideration. In order to treat collectives as morally responsible agents, their internal task division has to be made clear, in a way that amounts to splitting up the collectives completely into their individual members. Moral responsibility can only be undertaken by individuals, that is beings that cannot be split up into further parts any more. A collective as such cannot be liable to moral accusations.

Further, a group decision is legitimate as such only in so far its members and only they are involved in decision-making. This is a demand in the interest of members of the group. Members of a collective do not want it to be despotic. But it is also the reason why a collective has an interest in the individuality and rationality of its members. Fully fledged group members must be able and willing to undertake responsibility themselves in order act

14. Cf. Brandom, 1998 p. 253 f.

on behalf of the collective. For sake of moral judgment, a group's actions should be dissolvable into individual actions of their members.

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