I that is We and We that is I: A Defense of Methodological Holism and the Primacy of Collective Agency[*]

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In a Hegelian spirit, this paper advances a methodological holism based on the ontological primacy of collective agency. The first section sketches the general problematic of methodological and ontological individualism and shows critical points. Two core components are discerned: an atom-like view of individuals as separate and independent from society and a mechanistic pattern of explanation that reduces institutions to interactions of singular individuals. In the second section, I argue in favor of methodological holism by showing that singular individuals are the product of the community in which they are raised. The section demonstrates methodological primacy of the whole through its 'normative' causality on individuals' existence, identity, attitudes and actions. Singular individuals and their actions are rendered possible within and through the whole, taken as a set of institutions and structures. The third part presents a short account of a general individual (We-agent) that is causally effective in a normative and rational way. General individuals have intentionality, mind, personality, interests, etc. of their own that manifest in actions, thoughts and attitudes of singular individuals. General individuals differ from singular individuals by the scope of their interests and goals. General individuals possess intrinsic rationality and normativity that shows a pattern of valid explanation in the manner of methodological holism.

Keywords: methodological individualism, ontological holism, methodological holism, institutional person, collective agency, Hegel.

Introduction

In light of the growing cultural, economic and political individualization, this paper challenges methodological and ontological individualism (MI/OI) using methodological and ontological holism (MH/OH). On the one hand, I argue that natural or singular individuals[1] are ontologically derived from and dependent on the whole of society or community viewed as a set of institutions, values, norms etc. On the other hand, institutions are

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1. Historically, questioning the correct naming of the single individual and collective plural subject has proved to be a profound inquiry. Hobbes, for instance, used the label *natural* and *artificial* man (Hobbes, 1839: ix-x). Today, terms like 'collective agent', 'group agent' and 'collective intentionality' are widely used. In this paper, I shall use the terms singular individual for a single human being and general individual for an institutional person or a collective agent taken as a unity. As I hope to show, an idea of a state of nature presupposing singular individuals that found assemblies, collectives, groups, and aggregates is untenable. While collective entities exist, they are comprised of grown-up separate individuals emergent from the whole.

not only structures but also possess intentionality and agency on their own; they are individuals of a particular sort and fundamental character, which I call general individuals.

I take several of Hegel's guiding ideas for unraveling holistic positions and placing an individual into the context of his social environment in ontological and methodological respects[2]. Thus, Hegel's philosophy inspires the position I argue for, but it is not a reconstruction of his views. Taking his theses and notions as guiding lines, I tailor and place them into contemporary debates, providing arguments formulated in contemporary terms. In this way, a certain divergence from Hegel's position is inevitable. In doing so, I suggest the methodology of reinvigoration of ideas from the history of philosophy with a strong conviction that those ideas have undeniable relevance for contemporary debates. As M. Foucault reminds us, history is not a history of the past but of the present. Should Foucault be correct, then it is true about philosophy first and foremost. As one would expect, the confines of a paper do not permit us an exhaustive analysis of these claims. As such, the present exposition should be viewed as introductory, especially considering the need to expound upon these claims together.

I. Methodological and ontological individualism

The distinction between macro and micro-level events in social sciences seems natural. Macro-level facts pertain to "large-scale" or structural events like economic recession, peace treaties etc., or it refers to the institutions such as property, monetary systems, universities, marriage, banks and so on. Micro-level social facts pertain to "small-scale" events or actions of singular individuals: John married Amy, Peter was fired, a criminal robbed the store etc. The horns of the distinction represent patterns of explanations of MH and MI. Both positions have ontological versions claiming the ontological primacy of individuals (OI) or groups, communities, and society as a whole (OH). A micro-level event seems to be adequately explained by the invocation of attitudes, i.e., beliefs, reasons, actions, and decisions of singular individuals involved that are accounted for by psychology (desires, needs, feelings etc.). A macro-level event or action *prima facie* seems to be better explained by reference to general, structural or institutional entities or factors. A university aims to educate young adults, saturate the market with professionals, and satisfy employers' demands. The Treaty of Versailles was signed because the German Reich economy could not sustain the war expenses any longer and so on[3].

These positions have been subject to ongoing debates on social explanation and ontology: the literature is already innumerable[4]. The longstanding and dominant tradition of MI aspires to reduce all social facts, including macro-level, to the most fundamental

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2. The true is the whole (*das Wahre ist das Ganze*), the absolute is not only substance, but also the subject; I that is We, and We, that is I. See Hegel's *Phenomenology* (Hegel 2018: 20, 25, 177; here, I follow the pagination by paragraphs). See Knapp. 1986 for comparison and influence of Hegel upon the subsequent sociological thought, also (Bubner, 1995; Pippin, 2008; Stekeler, 2021, 2022).

3. See Jackson, Pettit, 1992b for an identification of several structural types of macro-level facts.

4. To name just a few: Danto, 1973; Currie, 1984; Tannsjö, 1990; Just, 2004.

entities: singular individuals, their attitudes and the resulting interactions[5]. All large-scale entities should be analyzed and boiled down to the actions and attitudes of singular agents for the sake of methodological economy, in order to achieve neat and simple yet elegant explanatory patterns (for more examples, see Haslanger, 2022: 512; Jackson, Pettit, 1992b: 97).

There are two crucial aspects to that picture. First, it is an atom-like view on singular individuals whose attitudes and actions can be explained either psychologically, based on preferences and habits, or as an expression of freedom and capacity for rational free choice with intricate norms of action and reasoning. (This rationality appears then to be thought of as innate or rooted solely in singular individuals' minds). Individuals are methodologically and ontologically taken to be self-subsistent and independent agents, fully formed and grown-up intrinsically rational persons who make decisions about goals and ways of attaining them. Each individual's action reflects the pursuit of their interests. This is usually economic in modern times, so they communicate and interact accordingly to achieve said economic goals[6]. Therefore, singular individuals can be understood tacitly as monads with invariant and pre-given goals and needs. The second aspect is the mechanism-based model of explaining those interactions on the micro-level constitutive for events and facts on the macro-level[7]. The resulting interaction elicits in an aggregative manner supervening properties such as society, institutions and structures understood solely as the result of the actions of singular individuals. In reliance on singular individuals' psychology in our explanation of social phenomena — both in large-scale and small-scale cases, one tends to proceed by applying mechanistic models of reasoning based on a notion of physical causality[8]. The reductionism of MI is similar to that

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5. There are several debate stages; the question about micro-foundations thrived during the 1980s (see Zahle, 2007).

6. This gave rise to game-theoretical models of collective behavior. For an influential example, see Olson, 1965.

7. See (Hedström, Swedberg, 1996). Hobbes described all living beings and artificial men as automata (Hobbes 1839, ix), influencing subsequent generations. We must admit that some recent versions of MI have come to acknowledge the relative independence or irreducibility of structural or institutional factors. Further, the connection between MI and mechanistic pattern of explanation has also incurred questioning (see Van Buowel, 2019).

8. Ever since Hobbes' shaping of subsequent debates, thinking about and explaining the social is rare. Most researchers begin with an individualistic perspective and try to build aggregate-like models of social interaction and collective intentionality and agency (Gilbert, 1989; see Jackson, Pettit, 1992b: 98, also Tuomela, 2013). This stands in striking contrast to ancient models of explanation that mainly were organicist-based. The two factors mentioned gave rise to economic game theory that started with that kind of anthropology. It further proceeds to calculate and predict human behavior in the modus of *homo economicus* as pursuing one's material interest or happiness. (The trick is, quite in the Foucauldian vein, that such objectification creates this type of individual in the first place). It often remains unaccountable for the fact that there are different kinds of anthropology and psychology across different cultures. As Nietzsche pointed out in "The Twilight of Idols": "People do not strive for happiness, only the English do." (Nietzsche, 2005: 157). He meant bearers of this attitude and pointed to the English as an example of a nation that adopted such a stance. However, one cannot say (at least not without some further premises) that every human being seeks this kind of happiness in economic consequentialist or utilitarian terms. P. Stekeler claims that collective behavior analysis overlooks morally free cooperation that is responsible for the existence of society in its difference from mere interactions of agents

found in the exact sciences. Since the latter has proven to be productive, one presumes that the social sciences must replicate the physics paradigm to emulate its success. In other words, we must build an exact social science to achieve some semblance of physics' achievements[9]. Contractualist theories present one salient example[10]. These two aspects constitute the background premises of most contemporary research of collective agency, beliefs and intentionality within analytic philosophy and beyond (consider the sociology from M. Weber to F. v. Hayek, Popper[11], E. Goffman etc. onward to the majority of contemporary works within analytic philosophy[12]).

MI quite often, but not necessarily, goes with OI. This view has been prevalent and almost unquestioned up until recently[13]. The reasoning is as follows: singular individuals are generally considered natural bodily individuals as opposed to fictional or artificial individuals, e.g. a political state as an assemblage of natural individuals. Following the rise of natural science, or, recently, naturalized epistemology after Quine, naturalism and physicalism have exercised the impact that only physically graspable objects such as human bodies are considered tangible. The enterprise seems to fall within a widely respectable physicalist stance that wants to operate with graspable objects. Conversely, abstract entities do not nearly fit the pattern of good scientific explanation with observable and measurable entities, controlled experimental environments with testable and predictable reliable results. Consequently, such badly reputed concepts or insufficient abstract entities are either to be expelled from our theories or brought to clarity as theoretically unavoidable yet useful fictional posits that can and should be boiled down to individual facts and attitudes of single individuals. One can observe singular individuals (persons) and singular things (tables, trees, stones, buildings) that stand in causal relations in the world. But we cannot directly grasp institutions and structures. We cannot touch a university, only a building. We cannot see a revolution as material, only the crowd storming the Bastille. Likewise, we cannot see the law but its applications (say, detention) or copies of the book's written formulation. That said, the ontological postulation of entities of such character appears dubious: MI and OI are supposed to ground social explanation and ontology in observable entities.

under the principle of *homo economicus*. The reason is that collective behavior aims at the general or common good that supersedes a singular individual's interest (Stekeler, 2019).

9. See (Elster, 1982). It is not a coincidence that A. Comte labelled his project of social science as "social physics".

10. Hobbes' social ontology was the breaking point for such theories. The idea of the state of nature and the subsequent creation of society and state was prevalent during Modernity. To my knowledge, it was replaced by a better alternative only in the XX century by the works of R. Carneiro on the genesis of the state (see Carneiro, 1970). The idea of a social contract was fruitful as a heuristic model, but it has inflammatory features that are often mistakenly taken at face value.

11. On Popper's stance, see (Buzzoni, 2004).

12. For some examples, see (Lewis, 1969; Gilbert, 1989; Tuomela, 2010, 2013). In the last work mentioned, Tuomela claims the irreducibility of society to individuals and the full acceptance of We-intentionality and action. However, he does not address the issue of the origin of singular individuals and denies the personality of general individuals.

13. According to B. Epstein, "…theorists have largely arrived at consensus with regard to ontological individualism." (Epstein, 2009: 188).

Due to OI and mechanistic explanations, many theorists are likely to argue that social facts and properties are at least *prima facie* emergent, supervening or ontologically dependent on the actions and attitudes of singular individuals in an aggregate-like manner with a bottom-up direction of causality. According to this picture, singular individuals bring to life institutions and social facts that supervene on interactions between individuals. One of the main merits of this approach is based on its strict causal account because only physical objects can stand in causal relations and enact events and changes. In contrast, abstract objects can only exist because they are composed of singular individuals. Hence, all social phenomena are derivative of the actions and attitudes of singular individuals (Hedström, Swedberg, 1996)[14]. Ideally, this provides us with sound explanatory patterns with a one-way bottom-up direction of causality from singular individuals' actions to institutions and structures. Again, this leads us to psychologism, particularly social psychology in social facts.

Yet MI receives increasing criticism and may even need rescuing (e.g. Guala, 2022). Several conspicuous anti-psychologists claim the irreducibility of social events to individuals' psychology (Jackson, Pettit, 1992b: 103f; Haslanger, 2015, 2022; Stekeler, 2019). We may very well argue with good reason that the increase in criminal activity is caused by heat. However, this is not possible in many other cases, with institutions such as money or marriage (see Searle, 2010). A related point of criticism attacks the ideal of reductionism in MI: it has received several critical responses because of the ineptitude of a mechanistic explanation for social events. One is the regress argument (Tannsjö, 1990; Jackson, Pettit, 1992a; Hodgson, 2007). If we adopt this procedure seriously, we must expand it and go further into biology, chemistry and, ultimately, physics. The outcome is twofold. Firstly, we are expelled from the domain of the social and slip into behaviorism and stronger versions of determinism. In other words, we lose the social, which includes the freedom of individuals, since everything is reducible to a biological, chemical and, ultimately, a physical model. Such a consequence appears overly reductive and far-reaching; hence there is no shortage of denouncements of this view. John Searle is one of the critics of reductionism of psychology and intentionality to biological facts (Searle, 2010: 42f.). Among the great thinkers of the past, Hegel and Durkheim were congenial in claiming that the social is second nature (Hegel, 2012, §4) or a domain *sui generis* (Durkheim), governed by its inherent rules that cannot be explained in terms of physics. Thus, MI threatens to neutralize domain-specific features of the social and renders all the humanities and social sciences ill-founded. This contradicts mainstream political and ideological theories that trumpet individual and personal freedom and that presuppose MI in one version or another. Although some philosophers like D. Dennet and P. Churchland are eager to adopt reductionist consequences and deny the freedom of will, this seems to be too high a price[15]. Some political ideologies, such as liberalism,

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14. However, Van Buowel, 2019 denies a necessary link between mechanism-based explanation and MI. His paper sketches several mechanism-based descriptions and claims that MI can stand without them.

15. This is despite those who are eager to embrace the consequences and bite the bullet of denying freedom in ethical respect. Caruso, 2021 argues for abandoning the criminal punishment system due to the absence of free will.

and closely related ethics, are generally rooted in a commitment to personal freedom. In this respect, a mechanism-based explanation contradicts another core premise about atoms-individuals endowed with freedom and responsibility, creating internal tensions or forcing them to bite the bullet and accept some highly counterintuitive consequences.

II. Methodological Holism: *das Wahre ist das Ganze* and I that is We

1. Holism in Ontology, Methodology, and Causation

The first formula in the title should be read to mean that the correct standpoint in explanation (*das Wahre*, 'the true') is provided by the most general view of the functioning of a society that frames it in terms of parts and the whole (*das Ganze*) so that the whole is irreducible to parts and the parts can be understood within and from within the whole. In other words, we cannot know what a social event is unless we do not examine it within the framework of a society or a community. The second formula maintains that the whole of society or a community (institutions, values, norms and structures) is primary for the constitution of a singular individual: each person (the I) is constituted by and represents the community she/he was socialized in. It is important to stress that this should not imply subjugation or diminishment of persons in a totalitarian or despotic manner[16].

To challenge MI, our argument should demonstrate that singular individuals are not ontologically primary or fundamental in any causal sense because they are produced and shaped by the whole of society. It exerts a sort of causation (in a looser, non-mechanical sense) over them, providing us with an explanatory tool. The reason is that causal lines show us the path of explanation in both physical and normative terms. Description should follow the ontological fundamentality of the whole manifested in causality. Following this line of reasoning, I do not suggest the total elimination of MI, but a limitation, since it is perfectly fit to provide an analysis in ethical or some political respects. Essentially, we must show the dependent character of MI in close consideration of the ontological fundamentality of the whole and its needs. We cannot know a whole without its representation in singular individuals, nor should individuals be understood solely in the context of separate lone entities in a romantic spirit. Individuals are determined or produced by the whole.

To reiterate, I am making the case that the whole always precedes a singular individual since the latter emerges from the whole of society or, as a product, a manifestation of it; so are their attitudes and actions. It relates to our bodies, identity, self-image, rationality and normativity in theoretical and practical activities. In other words, holistic entities (general individuals) are ontologically and metaphysically fundamental for any single member. (Thus, OI is also rejected because singular individuals are ontologically secondary and dependent on the whole). Singular individuals are free functions, extensions or

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16. Hegel unambiguously emphasized the importance and immunity of free personality within society (see Hegel, 2012: §§35-38).

representatives of the whole—accordingly, one proceeds by the lines of MH in explaining micro and macro-levels. Perhaps to state this more directly, the attitudes and actions of singular individuals must be grasped through the study of individuals as a whole.

An exposition may skirt ontological lines, but not necessarily (so one can adhere to OH and proceed in the manner of MI[17]). Nevertheless, it has to follow causal chains to be explicatory. Reductionist-minded philosophers tend to deny normative accounts of causality, attributing that to behavioristic (psychological) determinism; despite that the normative/rationalistic stance has gained considerable ground in contemporary philosophy[18]. An example of physical causation in the social world can be birth etc.; normative causation involves goals, norms, rationality and reasons, like choosing a job or creating an institution for some purpose. Note that normative causation falls within but is not governed by rules from nature's domain, yet normativity and rationality are exercised in the world. Societies as a whole exercise functional causality, which has both physical and normative sides. Consider zoning regulations, which prescribe norms in multiple ways that regulate people's behavior, create dispositions, habits, etc., all the while displaying consequences in the physical world[19]. The type of causality I refer to does not bear a strong deterministic and unavoidable character. Instead, the whole more loosely shapes and produces singular individuals based on the inherent freedom of the whole and the individual. There might not have been Caesar or Napoleon — they could have died as infants, but events would have taken a similar course, with perhaps others taking their place. The emergence of Caesar or Napoleon is characteristic and reflective of their time and society.

In other words, institutions are not reducible to individuals' psychology without any theoretical loss. One cannot dispose of abstract concepts or entities of an institutional or structural character by attempting to explain social facts. These entities are indispensable, at least for methodological reasons (theoretical economy, classification etc.), which even adherents of MI (such as Popper) are compelled to acknowledge. Moreover, these entities present genuine and legitimate objects of investigation: they possess genuine (not only logical) properties, perform various functions, undergo changes, and even have intentionality, minds, actions and interests of their own.

This claim might seem to beg the question by introducing structures as fundamental entities even though there are no structures beyond singular individuals. Communities consist of individuals and *are* singular individuals arranged and formed in specific structural ways. Imagine two worlds where the same people live under a monarchy and a republic and this accounts for two different sets of psychological states, dispositions, beliefs etc. they respectively have. Singular individuals are parts of collective entities or

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17. In this respect, Hegel, despite being a holist, proceeded to develop all parts of his system from individuals both in his logic (somethings, this-beings and so on) and in his *Realphilosophie* (singular bodies, which went by the name of anthropology, in the philosophy of spirit and singular persons in abstract right).

18. See Davidson, 2003, also Brandom and Searle are normativists in this respect.

19. There are also different sorts of structural facts for which (Jackson, Pettit, 1990, 1992b) proposed a programming model of explanation (see the criticism by Walter, 2005). The idea is that societies do not exercise deterministic causality, but program, i.e. influence human actions to some extent.

general individuals. One should not embrace the opposite extreme and postulate some super-entity existing above and beyond communities and societies as manifestations of ghosts or spirits; however, societies are not aggregates of pre-given singular individuals. The analysis of collective entities composed of minded beings must include mereology as an explanatory pattern of the relation between parts and whole. Such an analysis makes the direction of causality a two-way street or, more precisely, circular one — from the whole to its parts and back. It is not a vicious circle, however, since it shows consistency and coherence and thus does not generate a strict logical contradiction or paradox. Societies and communities shape singular individuals and vice versa. Ultimately, the whole as a complex organism (this is also true about social animals or insects) prevails because a singular individual can exist and subsist only within the whole by partaking in collective practices and sharing common norms. The whole is defined by *and* actively sets the rules and playground for the actions and identity of its parts.

The whole (physically *and* normatively) creates and forms its parts, and then the parts act as parts of the whole and on its behalf[20]. This picture, according to which individuals gather to institute a society, is deeply misguided in some crucial respects. I argue that emergentism and supervenience as metaphysical explanatory models are misplaced when applied to explaining relations between social facts (on micro- and macro-levels) because they presuppose a one-way direction of causality[21]. According to the common notion of emergence, any supervenient property (in our case — society or institutions) should transform or change if any property or state at the fundamental level (singular individual) changes. Such an account seems untenable. Emergentist models fail for a similar reason: we cannot imagine the full-fledged, grown-up individuals that are needed to build a society in a pre-societal state like Hobbes' model suggests in the common bottom-up causality reading. On the contrary: the actions of singular individuals are explained, constituted and conditioned by institutions and structures in a top-down manner. Institutions and structures can exert causality on singular individuals in many ways due to the primary character of institutions (in a broad sense) concerning individuals. In this respect, the claim that institutions supervene upon singular individuals is reversed so that individuals emerge out[22] of communities and are formed within institutions that constitute the identities of communities. A full-grown individual is already a part of a society with language as its central ground. Evolutionarily, it goes back to the pre-human and pre-linguistic states of our development to hominids and back (see Tomasello,

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20. In Hegelese, the standpoint of the whole is the true one in explanation, *das Wahre ist das Ganze*. Further, the procedure from individuals to the whole reveals the progress to what has been there in truth all the time (e.g. Hegel, 2010, GW 21.57/ 49) — that the holistic view is ontologically and methodologically fundamental.

21. Though in some less fundamental cases, these patterns make sense — when previously unrelated singular individuals freely or accidentally form a small group on their own. But we should not extend such particular cases to the emergence of society as a whole. Every particular assembly of previously unrelated singular individuals is only possible through their prior socialization and participation in the entire community or society.

22. Perhaps, the term 'undervene' may be more apt here.

2010); note that holistic character is also intrinsic to social animals. Ontologically, groups and societies are necessary for the survival or existence of singular individuals and their identity as persons, allowing us to understand them (reference dependence and sense dependence in terms of R. Brandom). The whole is ontologically primary and fundamental.

2. Holistic Causality and Singular Individuals

Institutions have various causal effects on singular individuals by inevitably shaping and forming their intentionality (i.e., thinking), personal identity and psychology. First of all, institutions are causal regarding procreation and physical existence, governed by rational norms and located within nature. Institutions include various modes and structural preconditions such as rules governing marital customs, birth politics, nurturing neonates, medical and biological guidelines etc. Compare the infamous birth traditions of Sparta and today's politics of saving and sustaining people with illnesses and disabilities based on contemporary moral guidelines. Further, every singular individual depends on institutions in their subsistence (earning a living, medical care etc.) and the social status that defines one's identity. However, this does not fully exhaust or determine one's attitudes because of the freedom of any person: in numerous causal dependencies, persons always have alternatives in their choice of course of action; the whole will stay the same structurally and is only subject to change following an internal crisis. In this respect, the ontological order of existence and learning affects the methodological order of explanation.

Structural and institutional factors shape individual psychology and intentionality via socialization, education and embedment in various contexts with intrinsic behavior guiding rules. An agent, a singular individual is nothing but a set of interpersonal values, commitments, internalized norms, etc., that constitute their identity[23]. Personality types are rooted in the communal practices of given societies; this is the concept of personality itself since the community one inhabits defines their psychological attitudes. Taking up values and rules to learn norms and behave accordingly is evidence of this observation. As singular individuals, we are psychologically determined by our family, social and economic status, ethnicity, religion, gender, social role at the workplace and so on. Individual intentionality and attitudes derive from society as a set of structures and institutions. The structures and institutes are active practices that are lived and performed; they are values and norms that are demonstrative of implicit and explicit sets of rules and values constituting the community of any level of universality. Anger as an emotion is expressed (whether allowed to be displayed, or should be suppressed, etc.) in various ways. The same goes for the treatment and expression of all our emotions and actions. Emotions that are ostensibly personal and individual are also rooted in the social fabric of the com-

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23. This does not deny personal freedom as the capacity to change or choose that is always defined in the real world by history and a personal 'character' as a rigid core of personality. As a simile, individuals are a network of lived specific values, attitudes, and qualities.

munity[24]. When Jane falls in love, the emotions and considerations would be drastically different depending on her upbringing (say, in a traditional, archaic or modern society[25]). Singular individuals are but a collection of actions and attitudes formed by environmental and educational conditions as well as previous choices and actions. Individual psychology amounts to patterns of learning, interiorized social relations, perhaps with some anthropological invariants[26]. A personality in the general sense cannot be attributed to a child raised by wolves. An emotion such as anger finds expression (or suppression) in all cultures, but the community preconditions all emotive displays nonetheless. Let me give you a fictional example about the same person in two possible worlds. Remember Voltaire's "The Huron; or Pupil of Nature" (L'Ingénu). It portrays an indigenous American who is later revealed to be a child of French parents who accidentally lost him. Subsequently he was raised by indigenous Canadians. Voltaire's protagonist has become a part of their native tribe and absorbed their customs, attitudes, beliefs etc. Should he have been raised as a regular Frenchman, he would have adopted a Westernized mode of thought and action that Voltaire so chastised for its hypocriticality and insincerity. In this way, Voltaire drew the distinction between 'a child of nature' and a 'civilized' European. Indeed, this was a literary experiment drawing on Rousseau's idea of 'gentle savages' opposite to the story of Robinson, but the case in point remains that one and the same person would have two different identities should he be born into different communities. His actions are determined by his categories, attitudes and inculcated virtues or vices: *The whole lives within him as in its extension*[27]. R. Brandom has conceptualized this in terms of normative status and normative attitudes. For Brandom, normative status (role) is derivative of reciprocal relations of claiming to have a role and being acknowledged in that role (see Brandom, 2019: Ch. 9). In other words, the statuses that define our identity only exist within a community and to have a status means to be recognized in that status by others. Statuses are social roles that only function within institutions: a judge, a female, a child, a Christian etc.

The picture, according to which a singular individual creates her world out of herself, is thus, ill-conceived. Conversely, one is limited and determined in what one could think or want from one's culture and tradition. This does not, however, entail that the

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24. Consider Durkheim's work on suicide and social structural factors influencing such individualistic events.

25. One should avoid the naive antisocial sentiment of abolishing and destroying society so that singular individuals can be set free from oppressive society. A free individual apart from and above institutions of society is illusory.

26. A fascinating and *prima facie* correct thesis is that most of what is held to belong to psychology is social (see Stekeler, 2019), such as different kinds of psychoanalysis with super-ego as internalized norms of society or systemic therapy that tries to solve internal problems through analysis of intra and interpersonal relations.

27. This bears on two critical points of commonality; singular individuals from different societies and differences between individuals within the same society. The commonality is grounded in a human's conceptual thinking capacity that is tied to language. Our language capacity ensures the ability to learn new rules, languages, practices, etc. The difference is rooted in implicit conflicts within a set of norms and regulations in any given society on any level of universality. This dialectical process of identification, addressing and solving conflicts accounts for development and practice change.

life and thoughts of any singular individual are predetermined mechanistically or somehow induced in the manner akin to the Matrix scenario. Being around other people and participating in multiple practices and learning norms and rules develops our capacity for complex intentional acts, our psychology and our identity. Many authors have followed the path of Wittgenstein (Searle, Stekeler, Brandom) and correctly argued that our personalities are a product of practices we are involved in and are impossible without linguistic competence. Searle argued that we already have institutions as long as we have language. Language is a communal practice logically underlying manifold other practices: "You can imagine a society that has a language but has no government, property, marriage, or money. But you cannot imagine a society with a government, property, marriage, and money but no language." (Searle, 2010: 109). Thinking and mental acts of any kind (at least of an intentional sort) proceed by deploying categories. Intentions, beliefs, goals etc., the concepts we deploy are common good and can be only available within a community of society. We construct the world when we think, classify, or bring under categories. Being able to think means being part of a group of people that share *Geworfenheit*, *In-der-Welt-sein*, *Beisammensein* etc., within a community and, hence, a category network. No one can fully grow into a person without mastering language, thus, without acculturation in a family and a community. The individual core as dispositions and character may be relatively stable, but how it develops makes all the difference. Even the basic actions and beliefs we deem invariant or context-independent are conveyed by structures in the upbringing process. Without participation in social life, a human being can neither think nor act but rather behaves like a wolf or any animal that might raise him — should the infant survive[28].

The factors I shortly addressed do not always present causality in the strong sense but often determine or program conditions. However, it is hardly possible to elaborate an account of the causal efficacy of some factors (e.g. Kant denied that teleology is causal in the usual sense, see (Förster, 2012: 138f.), but we can expand on the concept of causality), for we may speak of causality in a more loose sense, as a convergence of manifold factors that produce social events. Regardless, the roots are to be found not in singular individuals but in shared and lived norms out of which singular individuals emerge.

3. Actions are Pathways Within the Whole

An agent's embeddedness in society reflects their actions within society's rational space comprised by structures and institutions. In this respect, the whole is causally fundamental (as it provides the conditions) to the actions of singular individuals.

Institutions are found as the playgrounds for possible actions of singular individuals so that the existence of an institution facilitates and enables certain types of activities. Institutions provide us with practical and theoretical normativity as well as shared and

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28. There have been several documented cases of wolves raising a human baby.

lived rationality[29]. The attitudes and actions of singular individuals are tailored along the lines laid down by structural and institutional factors, so that these attitudes and actions are impossible without those institutions. Marriage, mortgages, birthday parties and the elected office are all valid examples. No one can intend, desire or believe in the need to acquire a home mortgage if institutions granting such opportunities do not exist. However, it does not follow those institutions exist before or above human beings; institutions evolve from basic to more complex forms. John Searle aptly revealed the institutionalization and logical structure undergirding the human being's capacity for language (Searle, 2010). Institutions are endowments, extensions or manifestations of human capacities. Hence why, many theorists such as Searle rightly assert that institutions constitute and enhance our freedom. The obverse is also true; hardly any human action is free or devoid of the social or institutional element. We can label this the institutional primacy regarding the intentionality of people in society. One crucial point is that singular individuals are not deprived of freedom by this observation, for the very idea of freedom is bound and shaped by the norms and rules constituting any action. Singular individuals can navigate and choose, however, as members of society, their priorities and options are ingrained or perhaps, already pre-conditioned.

Nowadays, authors such as J. Searle and R. Brandom, to name a few, have come to recognize that institutions have binding normative nature. The fabric of institutions has normative and (more or less loose or rigid) compelling power — a 'second nature' that is categorically different from purely psychological mental events commonly understood in the realm of the first nature. However, human psychology is permeated by various normative or institutional factors rationally driven by the same normative obligatory force. P. Stekeler understood that norms are not just in our heads but in the fabric of society as inter- and transpersonal. A law, a moral norm, or a custom exhibits various types of normative power varying from strong (taboos) to weak coercive forces that may serve as reasons. Reasons are the causes of actions, beliefs and, ultimately, attitudes of the free entities that we are[30]. Agent A acted according to the binding norm N, so we can say that the norm was the reason why Agent A acted that way[31]. A lawful action may have several underlying layers of motivation, but acting according to law because it is right (customary etc.) is a reason for such an action. I stop at a juncture in front of a red light because I consider the law obligatory. I may break this law because I view my time as more important. In rare instances, this indicates my personal attitude, but usually, it reflects the customs of my community. In another country, I will likely change my attitude as a result of my exposure to a different society. The institutions constitute causality and provide obligatory and regulative reasons and patterns of reasoning to take this or that course of action that one can study empirically.

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29. Jackson, Pettit, 1992b proposed the term 'program explanation' and described 'filtering' in opposition to other forms of institutional explanation.

30. Examples of advocates of this stance are Davidson, 2001: 3-20, Dretske, 1989.

31. The often overlooked problem is that norms and individuals have history, they change and often diverge from norms. We cannot, however, say that they are not causal.

The intentionality of a singular individual should not be regarded as the cornerstone of structures from the methodological point of view. Rather, singular individual intentionality derives from society as a set of structures, institutions, and subgroups with their respective particular norms and values. This maxim was concisely explicated by Quentin Skinner (Skinner, 2002: 114-122). In explaining and understanding persons in history (particularly in the history of ideas, but nothing prevents us from relating this to our own time), we do not strive to find out what humans of the past held with respect to their unique personalities as signs of their uniqueness. As Skinner claimed elsewhere, intertextuality constitutes the ground of ascription of intentionality, beliefs and actions in explanation. This means that to understand an agent's attitudes and actions, we must scrutinize various widely held norms, beliefs and values of the community of which the agent is a part. As Skinner adds, "…our main attention should fall not on individual authors but on the more general discourse of their times." (Skinner, 2002: 118). This relation may be positive, like the affirmation of the state's existing affairs, or negative and subversive due to internal bureaucracy. This is not limited to the rules of discourse only; the principle extends beyond all the norms of a society. In other words, this stance presupposes that we should assess and estimate one's attitudes invoking the most general knowledge about institutions of the time and society when we try to understand a given singular individual and his attitudes and actions. Hence Hegel was right to claim that the true is the whole (*das Wahre ist das Ganze*). However, one should bear in mind that those general attitudes manifest themselves in the attitudes and actions of individuals who are part of their communities. We should not methodologically avoid or fully reject singular individuals.

Attitudes of any singular individual are determined and considerably depend on what this individual holds about other individuals and their attitudes and actions. Attitudes hinge on the mechanisms of recognition, self-awareness and reflection of different attitudes (see Honneth, 1992; Brandom, 2019: Pt. 2). We depend on other people ontologically, and when we reason something to be true, we speak and act accordingly. Persons have intentionality; they are conscious about other things and beings. They are aware of the attitudes of others and conform their actions and beliefs to the actions and beliefs of others. This rings true across all the aspects of life we can think of. One crucial example is evident in social epistemology and inquiries into the sociality of human knowledge and belief. We reflect, think over and react to the actions and beliefs of others and adjust our behavior accordingly. As individuals, we make decisions, but their content, variety and reasons for and against are predetermined by our communities and society, by our internalized values, virtues and norms that constitute our identity. Hence, we cannot dispose of holistic explanations and institutions as abstract but causally influential entities in explaining social acts and events that rely on a strictly individualistic perspective.

Perhaps we can fruitfully think of societies as networks with persons as their knots and relations as connecting lines. Their intentionality — the very ability and unique set of properties and attitudes, partakes in said relations and is created by them. One pivotal aspect is that there are degrees of freedom, and the freedom of a singular individual is of

lesser reach and intensity than the freedom of the whole human society (or general individuals at their developed stage which Hegel called *der an und für sich seiende Wille*). The freest person is the institutional or general individual that is instantiated and realized in institutions. Such an individual has intentionality and a personality of their own. Singular individuals are impossible without the whole and exist only as parts of it.

III. Ontological Holism and General Individual: We that is I or the Substance is the Subject

The previous part of the article describes the structural moment similar to Durkheim's (as well as Althusser's) approach. Hegel's innovative point is that the structures and institutions possess intentionality (including attitudes, beliefs etc.), personality, agency and history. Hegel means this by when he states that the substance is also the subject and the We, which is the I[32]. Institutions are more than a sum or aggregate of singular individuals. Further still, the intentionality of institutions is primary to the intentionality of singular individuals so that the former is not reducible to the latter. As Searle would add: "…we can grant that the strong forms of collective intentionality, those involving cooperation, are irreducible to I-intentionality", although he remained committed to the idea that this collective intentionality is nowhere but in our heads (Searle, 2010: 60).

Recently, this subject has become popular and mainstream analytic philosophy has adopted the terms 'collective intentionality', 'we-intentionality' or 'collective agent' to supplement their study[33]. There is no shortage of literature on this topic[34], and few scholars refuse to acknowledge collective intentionality and agency. Whether we should hold this literally, or in a fictional sense — as in aggregate agents[35] — remains a contentious issue. While affirming existence of collective agents (We-intentionality), 'realists' insist

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32. Most pointedly advocated for in: (Rose, 2009: 209f, 215f, 228f). R. Brandom conveys this as follows: "In this social, historical form, the "we" in question is a historically extended community that is both the author and the product of discursive norms" (Brandom, 2019: 264). One has to admit that Hegel proceeds in this manner from the individual to the general or universal in his mature writings. Nevertheless, he argues for the ontological priority of the whole as being more 'true' and reaches the standpoint of the primacy of the whole.

33. P. Pettit uses the expression 'institutional person' (Pettit, 2011). This problem was a topic of heated debates in Modern political philosophy, starting with the introduction of the term 'artificial man' by Hobbes that immensely impacted the subsequent tradition of political thought (later it came to be called 'fictional person'). As Q. Skinner shows, it was widely accepted and then put under criticism by J. Bentham (see Skinner, 2008), the forefather of negative liberalism that stands on the principle of non-interference. Hobbes held the state of nature as pre-societal when separate individuals competed and fought over resources. He further introduced the concept of 'person of the Commonwealth' as fiction in contrast to natural persons. Earlier, I criticized the picture of a pre-societal state, but the idea of a collective person is of great significance. However, an institutional person is broader than the concept of a state and can include lesser entities and groups. Such groups, assemblies, associations and collectives are possible because this institutional person or general individual serves its synthetic function, similar to Kant's idea of the transcendental unity of apperception. Civil society is the most developed organization of general individuals, albeit not reducible to the state.

34. As John Searle put it "Collective intentionality has recently become something of a cottage industry in analytic philosophy" (Searle, 2010: 45).

35. This classification is quite crude and does not convey the complexity and nuances of such positions.

they are irreducible to I-intentionality[36]. A middle ground is available, one that rejects the first part (the realism of collective agents) and adopts the second (irreducibility). The 'fictionalists' deny the real existence and irreducibility of such entities to intentionality of singular individuals as the building blocks. The latter view is more mainstream, and it was used to investigate We-intentionality as a shared intention of a plurality of singular agents. In my view, this indicates the core problem of that position: the adherents can only think of collective intentionality as an aggregate or shared intentionality of plurality as stemming from or emerging out of singular individuals' intentionality and followed-up interactions. In contradistinction, I argue that this collective intentionality and agency are real and irreducible. General individuals do exist because they have causal efficacy in their reasoning and actions. They are ontologically primary to singular individual's intentionality since the latter is constituted by the former — within a We as community or reference group to which any person belongs. The postulation of such an entity gives rise to various difficulties beyond this paper's scope.

It is similar to Hegel's criticism against Schelling's early identity philosophy because he swipes away all the differences and traces everything back to one indeterminate mysterious entity. Supposing for a moment, we accept that entity and try to use it in formal argumentation. In that case, it *prima facie* takes the following form: The fact F occurred because institutional person P wanted/believed/acted so that it appears as a result of the desire and action. Naturally, this explanation alone is untenable and is structurally identical to the saying that whatever happens does so because God wishes so, or because everything has a sufficient reason. However, such an explanation has no informative input. Nevertheless, this form can be transformed if we add purposeful activity on the part of the general agent. It has to show intrinsic normativity of rationality so that the explanation can take the following form: The fact F occurred because general person GP committed act A (created an institution, issued a regulation etc.) to solve the problem P. The presupposition made grants that we can view the reasoning behind the situation that poses a problem (it disrupts the functionality of the whole in some particular way). We can see the causal chain between the intention, the purported action A and achieving the desirable goal. Noteworthy is that the outcome does not have to be successful and can (in fact, it always does) contain false premises for a complex action that has to be rational or guided by norms or cannot be implemented in the desired way. Consequently, some malfunctions make room for recalibration and overhaul of the system should it face a crisis. As a relevant side note, it is one manifestation of the (unjustly) ill-reputed notion of dialectic.

General individuals are real due to the causal powers they possess and exhibit. This causality has consequences or manifestations in the physical world but it is also intrinsically normative and rational. The previous part of the paper tried to establish the thesis of the causal power of institutions; the goal of this part is to show that the actions of such

36. For instance: "But we hold that not only can such group agents exist; they can also exist as agents in their own right, distinct in a significant way from the agents who are their members" (Pettit, Schhweikard, 2006: 33)

institutions are (at least partly) deliberate and purposeful[37]. The whole of society is not only a set of institutions, norms, values etc., but it is also an active agent of such innovations and changes[38]. The causal power of general individuals is reflected in the real world so that it shapes, guides and directs the actions of singular individuals. Such actions also meet normative and rational causality criteria, for they produce, revive and live norms and values with real-world consequences. Since general individuals create and act upon themselves and the world outside of themselves, we are justified to say that general individuals create themselves (the Absolute in Hegelian terms).

General individuals have interests that surpass the horizon and goals of singular individuals. Such interests cannot be reduced to the particular goals or passions of singular individuals[39]. As shown in the previous section, singular individuals' rationality (in reasoning and action) is collective and can be absorbed and practiced exclusively within the community. The difference between the singular and general individual can be put in terms of the interests and attitudes of a singular individual that amounts to taking care of self-interpretation, self-preservation, self-care and so on. Therefore, a particular singular individual is self-absorbed in contrast with the interest and level of group intentionality, collective or general individual (see Hegel, 2012: §122-125). This distinction is far from clear-cut but necessary for our present concerns. The individual and general interests, purposes and intentionality can often go together[40]. The two aspects are so deeply intertwined that they cannot be separately instantiated in a real-life situation. When a child goes to school, this is for her future education. But at the same time, this serves the purpose of socialization and preparation for a societal role. When a construction worker does his job, he earns his living and satisfies the collective need for buildings, etc. The rise of Napoleon had much broader reasons and consequences than his vanity and ambitions. Napoleon's case sealed the principal fall of *Ancien Regime* and spread bourgeois legal institutions on European monarchies, among other overarching effects.

However, institutions manifest themselves in singular individuals, their attitudes and actions. The task is to show how such entities can make sense ontologically and how they act independently. Once again, this entity does not commit us to something apart from individuals (cf. Searle, 2010: 45). General or collective individual, the institutional person lives in and through singular individuals, but this nonetheless creates normativity and validity beyond individuals taken separately. Based on this validity, we cannot claim that it is all just in our heads since it creates a world of meanings. The whole is explained as a set of living practices, norms, rules and values that possess intrinsic rationality. Assuming a correct understanding, we can use general terms referring to individuals who are said to reason, act, make decisions and so on. Singular individuals exemplify, instantiate and

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37. There are some unrecognizable aggregate or structural effects like the invisible hand of God or the cunning of reason.

38. It is the task of philosophy to conceptually make sense of said changes. By working on conceptual schemes, philosophy changes, reinterprets and forms concepts.

39. This is reminiscent of Hegel's criticism of the *Kammerdiener* position.

40. Perhaps they can go together, but a problem is posed by the actions of singular individuals that disrupt or harm the whole.

manifest the norms and values constituting the general individual they are part of; they act and think on behalf of general individuals. The invocation of individuals should not be seen here as an explanation in MI manner, as in event E happened as a consequence of the action of singular individual A. The needs and tasks of the general individual explain quite the opposite, namely, the actions of singular individuals. Normative systems that constitute the core of a general individual also think and act within and through singular individuals, allowing us to discern between communities, groups and ultimately, the whole of humankind in its history as general individuals.

In sum, institutions and structures determine and causally shape singular individuals. Yet the structures do not (in general, they also *should not*) depersonalize or deprive them of freedom. To the contrary, they bestow and enhance individuals with freedom. As opposed to singular or natural individuals, structures or institutes have often been seen as blind mechanisms alienated from and oppressing singular individuals. This is true in a specific and narrow way, and so we should not deprive ourselves of means of criticism. A crucial moment is when structures or institutions are bestowed with their own intentionality, ability to think, reason, make decisions and act. They are self-aware, active and autopoietic[41]; they can and do preserve themselves while also changing and developing. Singular individuals are derivations, extensions or free functions of those institutional persons or general individuals. The intentionality of singular individuals is derived from and grounded in We-intentionality or the general person.

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41. Not in the sense as ant colonies are auto-poietic. Rather, more how Hegel applied Spinoza's term 'substance' to 'ethical' communities (*sittliche Substanz*) as self-producing, *causa sui*.

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Я, которое есть Мы, и Мы, которое есть Я: В защиту методологического холизма и онтологической первичности коллективной агентности

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В гегелевском духе в данной работе отстаивается методологический холизм, основанный на онтологическом первенстве коллективной агентности. В первом разделе очерчивается общая проблематика методологического и онтологического индивидуализма

и формулируются критика. Выделяются два основных компонента: атомический взгляд на индивидов как на отдельных и независимых от общества, и механистическая модель объяснения, сводящая институты к взаимодействию отдельных индивидов. Во втором разделе я привожу аргументы в пользу методологического холизма, показывая, что отдельные индивиды являются продуктом сообщества, в котором они воспитываются. В этом разделе демонстрируется методологический примат целого через его «нормативную» причинность в отношении существования, идентичности, установок и действий индивидов. Отдельные индивиды и их действия становятся возможными внутри и через целое, взятое как совокупность институтов и структур. В третьей части представлено краткое описание общего индивида (мы-агента), который каузально эффективен нормативным и рациональным образом. Общие индивиды обладают интенциональностью, разумом, личностью, интересами и т. д., которые проявляются в действиях, мыслях и установках единичных индивидов. Общие индивиды отличаются от единичных индивидов масштабом своих интересов и целей. Общие индивиды обладают присущей им рациональностью и нормативностью, что демонстрирует модель валидного объяснения в манере методологического холизма.

Ключевые слова: методологический индивидуализм, онтологический холизм, методологический холизм, институциональная личность, коллективная агентность, Гегель