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Rationality: The Critical View

METHODOLOGICAL INDIVIDUALISM AND INSTITUTIONAL INDIVIDUALISM

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My aim in the present essay is to argue that individualism need not be psychological, and to defend institutional individualism, which I consider to be Popper's great contribution to the philosophy of the social sciences.

1

Here is my glossary.

- (1) *Individualism*: The theory which ascribes the power to act to all and only to those who have the power to decide, and which ascribes this power to all and only to individuals; not to collectives, and not to computers, etc.
- (2) *Psychologism*: The theory that every social theory, economics, sociology, political theory, etc., is reducible to psychology; that every social explanation can be fully explained, in its turn, by a purely psychological explanation (using only laws of psychology, and also laws of physics and biology, etc., but not of sociology etc.); that any social theory is in the final analysis a branch of psychology.
- (3) *Collectivism or holism*: The doctrine that individual ends and decisions are created by social forces; thus they are constrained by social constraints and subject to conformity with the good of society at large, the *summum bonum*.
- (4) *Institutionalism*: The denial of psychologism; the claim that the social sciences are autonomous and not reducible to psychology: that there exist distinct social yet not psychological entities (called institutions, customs, traditions, societies, etc.).
- (5) A final remark on the word '*methodological*' which may be prefixed to any of the four terms defined above. Max Weber distinguished his own individualism of method from the individualism which appears in his historical studies. His term 'individualism of method' or 'individualistic methodology' was turned by Ludwig von Mises into its present form 'methodological individualism'. Popper and Hayek endorsed this usage and, with J. W. N. Watkins, they made it common. 'Methodological' is to be contrasted with 'ontological' – not so much as a thesis but as a mode of

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argument: when we defend a thesis by arguments from the field of (scientific) method, arguing about its fruitfulness or usefulness, etc., we use the prefix 'methodological' to characterize the thesis at hand.

This, too, seems to me to be a point on which Weber was fairly explicit:¹

It is in any case a tremendous misunderstanding to assume that an individualistic methodology presupposes also an individualistic system of values. ... Even the socialist economy would be individualistic for the purpose of sociological analysis. That is, it must be understood on the basis of individual behaviour ... Truly empirical sociological investigation begins only with the question, what did and still does motivate the individual ... Any formal functional analysis which uses the 'whole' as its point of departure can accomplish only preliminary preparations for further investigation; its utility and indispensability is, if it is properly applied, of course incontestable.

Here, then, Weber allows both the individuals investigated, and the investigators, to hold holistic views and to apply them. What he insists on as a methodological individualist is simply that his empirical investigations centre around individual ends. This should suffice for a terminological prelude. Further clarifications will follow, I hope, in the body of my presentation. Let me conclude this introduction with this general point. I tend to consider as one of the most significant changes in twentieth-century philosophical practice, to be that of a shifting in debates concerning doctrines from ontology (theory of what there is) to methodology (theory of the study of whatever is there). It seems to me to be the joint invention of Max Weber and Ludwig von Mises - popularized and entrenched with the aid of Hayek and Popper, to be sure.

2

When the individualist contends that only individuals are responsible actors on the social and historical stage, the holist retorts that society is more than merely a collection of individuals. To this retort the individualist answers that there is no mysterious additional entity which turns a collection of individuals into a society; a collection of individuals is a society if there is strong interaction between them; this interaction is due to the fact that when any one individual acts (rationally) on the basis of his own aims and interests, he takes into account the existence of other individuals with aims and interests. To this the holist retorts that the individualist misses the point; that people's aims do

¹ Max Weber, *Basic Concepts of Sociology*, translated by H. P. Secher, New York, Citadel Press, 1962, para. 1, 9.

not constitute a society but rather depend on society; so that members of different societies have different aims and interests. The individualist in turn answers that the holist misses the point, by taking the social setting as God-given rather than as explicable in terms of human action. The holist in turn argues that human action does not determine but is rather constrained by, or directed by, the social setting (perhaps because social forces are much stronger than any single individual).

This argument may be schematized in the following manner in an attempt to characterize the two traditional views.

(a) Holism

1. Society is the 'whole' which is more than its parts (holism).
2. 'Society' affects the individual's aims (collectivism).
3. The social set-up influences and constrains the individual's behaviour (institutional analysis).

(b) Individualism

1. Only individuals have aims and interests (individualism).
2. The individual behaves in a way adequate to his aim, given his circumstances (rationality principle).
3. The social set-up is changeable as a result of individuals' action (institutional reform).

It is obvious that here we have a characterization of two different positions. Yet so far the characterization is not sufficient to bring out the fact that these two positions are mutually incompatible. Traditionally, many individualists have refused to assume the existence of any social entity *because* they assumed that only individuals can have aims and interests. They viewed 'the national interest', 'public policy', and suchlike expressions either as empty or as mere shorthand expressions for sum-totals of many individuals' interests and policies. The holists, however, have traditionally insisted that national aims, class-interests, and *destinies of social groups* do exist. Logically this amounts to altering our schema in the following way: we add to *both* views, holism *and* individualism, the following proposition, and reinterpret the other propositions in its light.

4. *If* 'wholes' exist *then* they have distinct aims and interests of their own.

The reason proposition 4 was introduced is that it renders proposition 1(a) inconsistent with 1(b); that is to say, from 1 (a) and 4 we can deduce that 1(b) is false and from 1(b) and 4 we can deduce that 1(a) is false. Strictly formally, we cannot do the same with 2(a) and 2(b), or with 3 (a) and 3(b). Yet it is very easy to interpret 2(a) and 2(b) in the manner in which 4 will render them inconsistent with each other; and the same for 3(a) and 3(b). Moreover, it is easy to observe that this interpretation is adequate, namely, that it is the

intended interpretation (as logicians will say); much evidence can be elicited from the literature to support the claim that this interpretation makes the propositions 2 (a) to 3(b) nearer to what many traditional writers had in mind. Let us take this briefly step by step. The individualist does not deny 2(a) (collectivism), when it is interpreted contrary to 4: he denies 2(a) when it is interpreted in accord with 4. That is to say, he does not deny that one's aims can be affected by others' aims, and he can explain rationally such phenomena; yet he merely denies that one's aims can be explained by reference to some overbearing social force or social aim. Similarly, the holist does not deny 2 (b) (rationality principle) when it is interpreted contrary to 4; he denies 2(b) when it is interpreted in accord with 4. That is to say, he does not deny that the individual acts purposefully (rationally). He merely denies that individuals' aims and physical circumstances alone determine human action. He insists, contrary to the individualist, that the aims of the social group exist, apart from the aims of each individual. And these social forces or aims constitute a major factor in determining the actions of its members. Again, the individualist does not deny 3(a) (institutional analysis) when it is interpreted contrary to 4; he denies 3(a) when it is interpreted according to 4. He does not deny that the behaviour of any individual is constrained and influenced by social factors, provided that we can explain such constraints and influences as results of the presence and choices of other individuals. Only when the holist attributes these social constraints and influences to the social group as above and beyond its members, or to the aim of the social group as above and beyond the aims of its individual members – only then does the individualist disagree with the collectivist. Similarly as to 3(b) (institutional reform): the holist does not deny it when it is interpreted contrary to 4; he denies it when it is interpreted in accord with 4. The holist denies 3(b) only when the set-up which the individual supposedly changes is the 'society' or the social group – this is to say society's aims and destinies; he will not deny that the individual can alter his material environment, or other individuals' tastes, and similar 'superficial' factors.

Thus, proposition 4 renders the previous propositions more definite by interpreting holism as the view according to which the individual's interest is bound to the existing social interest, and individualism as the view that *only* individuals exist and have interests. This form of individualism is known as *psychological* individualism, or as individualistic psychology.

Proposition 4 is not explicitly stated by writers on the present controversy, and it is not the only proposition which renders the two sides of our schema incompatible with each other. However, it is often implicit in many works on the controversy, old and new. Indeed it is sometimes so obviously implicit in these works that I find it a little puzzling that so few people have noticed it and have found it worthy of comment. Whether proposition 4 is acceptable

or not, refraining from stating it explicitly may easily lead to confusion. It is one thing to state explicitly that all individualism is psychological and quite another thing to confuse individualism with psychology.

Psychologism, however, conflicts with institutionalism in the same manner in which individualism conflicts with holism. Let me present this conflict in some detail as well, much along the same lines as I have presented the conflict between holism and individualism.

3

Historically, psychologism was taken as the basis of social science without much debate, indeed almost as an article of faith, by analogy to the claim that atomism has to be taken as the basis of the physical sciences. In reaction to psychologism, followers of institutionalism declare that certain social entities exist, and are of primary importance to the social sciences, even though their very existence is denied by psychologism. Examples for such social entities were tradition according to Edmund Burke and the state according to Hegel. These social entities were wholes which could not be described as merely collections of the individuals who happen to partake in them. Cultures for example, say some institutionalists, are at best reflected in the individual minds which partake in them; but even ideally, if we ever could piece together, through the study of the psychology of individual persons viewed in masses, an adequate image of the culture they partake in, still the reflection will not be identical with the thing reflected. The adherent to psychologism finds this doctrine oppressive and morally objectionable: society is subject to criticisms of individuals and is not a blanket under which they live. To this the advocate of institutionalism may retort that it is psychologism which preaches moral irresponsibility and sheer hedonism: the basic moral duty of the individual, the institutionalist may say, is to the society to which the individual belongs and owes his loyalty. To this the holder of psychologistic view will retort that it is the individual's right and duty to determine his society, not merely to accept it. Again, the institutionalist may retort to this by observing that society determines the individual rather than the other way around, as ample comparative studies, anthropological and sociological, confirm with much regularity.

We see here that on one point both individualist and institutionalist seem to agree: if we can explain a society, or a social institution, by the mere reference to the (psychology of the) individuals who partake in it, then it is not basic; otherwise it is. Let us use the words 'primary' and 'reducible' to describe the impossibility or the possibility of explaining something in terms of something else.

Let us now schematize this little debate further in the manner attempted above. Again, we have three couples of theses made to clash with the help of an additional thesis:

(c) *Institutionalism*

1. Society is the primary social entity (institutionalism).
2. One's primary duty is to one's society (collectivist morality).
3. Social conditions affect individual conditions (collectivism).

(d) *Psychologism*

1. The individual is the primary social entity (psychologism).
2. Society is subject to criticism of individual conscience (autonomy of morals).
3. Individuals affect social conditions (institutional reform).

The first point to get clear about all this is the way morality enters a theory of explanation. No one denies that both collectivist morality and individualist morality have been preached in the past. The question at bay is not only which is the right morality, but also which one should a social scientist employ in his social explanation. For, it is rather agreed by both parties (quite erroneously, I think) that a social scientist should employ the right moral theory in his explanation if and when moral values play a role in human conduct. Both parties agree that the wrong morality, when applied, can usually lead only to some friction; the collectivist sees in the application of individualist ethics not a significant factor but, at most, a bothersome friction – unless it leads to the total destruction of a society; and *mutatis mutandis* for the individualist.

To return to the contrast between institutionalism and psychologism in general, in order to render 1(c) and 1(d) incompatible, we add to *both* sides an additional premise:

5. Either society is primary, or the individual is primary, but not both.

The reason proposition 5 was introduced is that it renders proposition 1(c) inconsistent with 1(d). That is to say, if proposition 5 is not asserted, one may consistently assert both 1(c) and 1(d), but if proposition 5 is asserted together with proposition 1(c) then proposition 1(d) is thereby denied, just as if proposition 5 is asserted together with proposition 1(d), then proposition 1(c) is thereby denied. Again, it will be seen, propositions 2(c) and 2(d) are not contested by anyone, unless they are interpreted in accord with the constraining additional proposition, proposition 5. The way an adherent to psychologism comes to deny 2(c) is by reading it to demand from the individual an obligation above and beyond all obligations to all other

individuals. In other words, the adherent to psychologism will not oppose 2(c) unless 2(c) speaks of society as a primary entity, unless 2(c) views society as an object of moral duty as a primary entity. Similarly, the adherent to institutionalism will not reject 2(d) unless it conflicts with 2(c): institutionalism has nothing to say in principle against the view of the adherent of psychologism concerning individual obligation until it clashes with higher obligations. Similarly as to 3(c) and 3(d): as such no one denies that both the individual affects society and society affects the individual: these are both readily observed facts of social reality. What the conflict is about is the question, which of these two kinds of influences is primary – and we could declare both as primary, or we could declare neither as primary, thus preventing any possible inconsistency between propositions 3(c) and 3(d). But the acceptance of proposition 5 forces us both to endorse one of these two propositions and to reject the other.

Proposition 5 is very common in the literature, much like proposition 4. But unlike 4, 5 is explicit, and even quite frequently, and then as the common ground, as the proposition shared by the two parties. It is therefore fairly intriguing to examine the relation between propositions 4 and 5. Both are dichotomies: proposition 4 says either (a) or (b), and proposition 5 says either (c) or (d). There is a great temptation to equate (not to say confuse) (a) with (c), as well as (b) with (d). This would force us to declare that propositions 4 and 5 are equivalent: individualism is the same as psychologism and holism is the same as institutionalism.

This identification of the two disputes is traditional in the literature, though as far as I know it is only implicit there: it is Ernest Gellner who, in a debate with Sir Karl Popper and J.W.N. Watkins, has made the identification explicit. (I consider this no mean contribution, and I much regret not having acknowledged it in 1960.)

When we compare propositions 4 and 5 we see that the possible existence of the social wholes which proposition 4 refers to is declared by proposition 5 to be a primary existence. This is very congenial since it clarifies further the situation in that it nails down more precisely the meaning of proposition 4. We can put it in this way: the adherent to psychologistic individualism does not deny 1(a), the claim for the existence of social wholes, such as nations or social classes, in the superficial ordinary sense of 'exist' – in the sense in which entities may exist, yet only thanks to the existence of more primary entities. Rather, his concern is with the exploration of social phenomena, not with reports of their observations: we do observe phenomena which we find easy to report by describing social entities or institutions; but when an explanation describes social entities it cannot be final or satisfactory – the final, or the ultimate, or the primary, or the most satisfactory and complete explanation, he says, should refer to no social entities. In the final analysis, the

psychological individualist contends, social wholes do not exist; in more superficial contexts their existence is not denied. We may go the other way and say, proposition 4 clarifies proposition 5: the primary entities which proposition 5 speaks of are ends! Or perhaps entities with their own ends, or aims, destinies, or forces.

And so, propositions 4 and 5 together tell us something about the ideals of social science. They both tell us of the final explanations in the social sciences as those relating to ends. We may replace 4 and 5 with the statement that final explanations relate to ends, individual or social, but not both; this statement will be the common ground of the two contending schools. Propositions 4 and 5 amount to two dichotomies and then their combination unites them. This can be now put schematically, thus:

	<i>Individualism</i>	<i>Holism</i>
Psychologism	I	III
Institutionalism	IV	II

Proposition 4 asserts the horizontal dichotomy, and 5 the vertical one; their combination is the dichotomy between I, individualistic psychologism, and II, institutionalistic holism. Indeed, these are the two traditional options. Option I developed by the more traditional eighteenth-century writers from the classical economists, sociologists, and psychologists. Option II with the romantic nineteenth-century tradition and its offshoots, especially Marxism and functionalism.

4

The dichotomy between options I and II is not a logical necessity: one may deny it without fear of contradiction. There is at least one, and to my knowledge no more than one, view which not only denies the dichotomy, but also, in fact, all four options: it is orthodox mechanistic, or homeostatic, or cybernetic theory. But let us remain within the framework of our four options. There are rare examples of writers who abide by option III, or holistic psychologism; the only important instances of it are two, I think: Plato's division of the state into three classes in parallel to the division of the mind into three faculties, and Carl G. Jung's theory of the collective subconscious (and perhaps even its first glimpse in the philosophy of Leibniz). Now, it should be noticed that option III calls for a careful reinterpretation of the propositions 1-3(a) and 1-3(d). This has not been seriously attempted, to my knowledge, with the resultant ambiguity which might be expected. Perhaps the lack of attempts to clear this ambiguity lies in the fact that there

are so few writers who endorse alternative III, and they are not clear on many relevant issues. In particular, Plato is not clear because of an inherent ambiguity in the *Republic* – an ambiguity which Popper has explained as a systematic reluctance to contrast individualism and holism for fear of antagonizing the individualistic reader. As far as Carl Jung is concerned, matters are simpler: he is not clear on our issue since anyway it was not his habit to be clear.

We may similarly consider option IV, the institutionalist individualism. It is, indeed, the central purpose of the present paper to advocate for consideration this very option. It is, in other words, the central purpose of the present paper to deny the traditional dichotomy between options I and II.

But one must admit, at first, that there is much to say for the dichotomy between option I and II, i.e., for both proposition 4 and proposition 5. Admittedly these propositions are *prima facie* very convincing. They entail that either *all* statements about societies and social institutions should be taken at their face value or *all* of them should be viewed as shorthand assertions about many individuals. It sounds rather *ad hoc* to claim, as institutionalist-individualists have to claim, that *some* of these statements, say about the state of war between Britain and Germany, have to be taken at their face value, and some of these statements, about Germany's desire to win the war or its fight against Britain, have to be viewed as shorthand assertions about individuals. It sounds quite *ad hoc* to assert the primary existence of Great Britain yet to deny the primary existence of the British interest in the Middle East. This may partly explain the fact that traditionally social philosophers accepted proposition 4 without discussing it.

And yet, in spite of this *prima facie* argument in favour of propositions 4 and 5, let us reject them. Contrary to proposition 4, we may assert that 'wholes' do exist (though, of course, not in the same sense in which people exist), but they have no (distinct) interests. These 'wholes' are social groups as well as social institutions – in the widest sense of the word, and covering a wide variety, from customs to constitutions, and from neighbourhoods to states. An institution may have aims and interests only when people *give it an aim*, or act in accord with what *they consider should be its interest*; a society or an institution cannot have aims and interests of its own. Yet, both the individual and society are now taken as primary, at least in the sense that we cannot reduce psychology into sociology and we cannot reduce sociology into psychology. We shall have to say more about what exactly we mean by primary, because the very claim that both the individual and society are primary, weakens the sense of primariness. It will turn out later that the change is even more radical, that in a sense institutionalistic individualism cannot admit any primary society, namely, in the sense of ideal society, as Popper has amply explained. Here let us see what happens to the 12

propositions in our table of 3 by 4, from 1(a) to 3(d). As we have noted already, (a) and (b) conflict only in the presence of 4 which we reject, and likewise for (c) and (d) in the presence of 5 which we also reject. It will transpire very quickly that, indeed, the major asset of rejecting 4 and 5 is that consequently we may endorse all of these 12 propositions, though in a slightly modified sense. It so happens, indeed, that in their modified sense they seem much more interesting. Let us quickly survey all 12 propositions now in the manner in which they all cohere with each other.

It is obvious that we can incorporate both 1(a) and 1(b) into a consistent view which is incompatible with both holism and psychological individualism provided that this view contains the negation of proposition 4. And we can incorporate into this view all the other propositions in the above schema provided that they are interpreted not in accordance with proposition 4 but rather in opposition to it. Thus, in 2(a), not the aims of institutions but rather their existence affects the individual's behaviour: the existing institutions constitute a part of the individual's circumstances which together with his aims determine his behaviour in accordance with 2(b). While according to psychological individualism only material conditions may be considered as relevant circumstances, according to institutional individualism the existence of institutions may be considered as relevant circumstances too. This addition enriches 2(b) and turns it from the psychological rationality principle into what Popper calls 'situational logic'. Similarly, 3(a) is admitted as institutional analysis not by admitting that the aims of institutions constrain the individual's behaviour, but by admitting that the existence and characteristics of institutions (as well as people's adoption of definite attitudes towards them) constrain the individual's behaviour, according to the logic of his situation. 3(b) is the theory of institutional reform, of the way people may alter an institutional situation so as to abolish or enforce social constraints, and alter other people's attitudes (by resorting to violence or by democratic means - according to the logic of their situation).

Both 3(a) and 3(b) relate to an important aspect of human behaviour - *the unintended social consequences of individual actions*. The institutional analysis 3(a) will show how people act under certain circumstances in a way to forward their own aims, and in so doing affect the social system. In particular this will be so when their action is a reform of institutions 3(b)). It is the very combination of 3(a) and 3(b) which renders the unintended consequences so important and which amounts to a theory of social change. It would be deserving of the title 'social dynamics' had not this title been used differently by some sociologists. The holist social dynamics is but a historicist assertion of the goal or destiny of the social whole; it has no explanatory power. The psychological individualist social dynamics is but an idea about the interaction of many individuals; it is far too complicated to be capable of

development in any detail. None of these views of social dynamics accord with the following sketch of a simple example of social change. Consider the institutional circumstances 3(a)) under which some workers find it profitable to organize a trade union for collective bargaining 3(b)). In these new institutional circumstances following the formation of a trade union 3(a)), other workers will find it profitable to organize as well 3(b)). This subsequent situation in which most workers are organized 3(a)) makes it desirable for the employers to organize 3(b)). The existence of both workers' and employers' organizations will profoundly influence the relations between worker and employer 3(a)); and it may even bring about the government's intervention, perhaps in the form of new legislation 3(b)). Thus, unintentionally, the first trade union organizers have started a social avalanche.

So much for the denial of proposition 4. Similar considerations apply to the denial of proposition 5. Our last example may illustrate how, while denying proposition 5, we can accept both 3(c) and 3(d): individuals are affected by social conditions, and in their turn affect them. Similarly, accepting individual conscience 2(d)) as a source of criticism of society, we can still recognize society as the source and object of that conscience 2(c)), without fear of thereby endorsing collectivist ethics. Here, I should say in parenthesis, I find Popper's theory slightly out of focus: his moral philosophy seems to me to be too often more in accord with psychological-individualism 2(d)) than in accord with institutional-individualism 2(c) and 2(d)) - a point which can be modified with no great effort. In his *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Popper asserts a distinction between two moralities, the individualistic and the collectivist; he speaks only in passing of an individual's possible obligations to institutions, and this is neither sufficient nor in accord with his moral dichotomy. For my part, I prefer the theory of the individual's own decision of what is his responsive responsibility to his group, in a manner which forms something of a collective responsibility yet without tribalism and without collectivist ethics. This seems to me to be the obvious moral counterpoint to the social philosophy of institutional individualism. Perhaps my preference is rooted in my social conditioning, since this is the Jewish traditional moral approach. For my part, I suppose institutional-individualism is the modern social philosophy closest to traditional Jewish attitudes - but this is hard to nail down.²

Anyway, option IV, institutional-individualism, incorporates all twelve propositions, 1-3(a-d) mentioned above as interpreted contrary to both proposition 4 and 5.

² For further details see my 'Conventions of Knowledge in Talmudic Law' in Bernard S. Jackson (ed.), *Studies in Jewish Legal History in Honor of David Daube*. Jewish Chronicle Publ., London, 1974; also published as full issue of *J. Jewish Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1 (February 1974), pp. 16-34.

To all this I should add, in parenthesis, that many thinkers seem to have felt the need for a *via media* between the two traditional views, psychologism and collectivism, and even for a consistent synthesis between the reasonable elements in them. I maintain that Popper and his commentators have finally succeeded in carrying out this intuitively felt programme, thus rendering explicit the approach which underlies the fruitful and reasonable part of existing institutionalist social studies, while retaining the central thesis of individualism, namely the thesis that only individuals have (primary) aims and responsibilities.

5

In this section I shall try to criticize holism from a methodological rather than from a metaphysical viewpoint. I shall not discuss the existence or non-existence of group-interests (or of group-minds), but stress the metaphysical character of any assumption concerning group-interests, and the danger involved in not recognizing this metaphysical character, or in regarding holism as 'scientific'.

The major question to which holism gives rise concerns the relation between the distinct interests of the group and those of the individuals belonging to it. Logically, these two kinds of interest may be in harmony or in conflict. The diversity of individuals' interests forces one to admit that the group's interest may be in conflict with some individuals' interests. One has to decide then, in case of a conflict of individual and group interest, which of these is, or should be, dominant. (1) One may assert that in case of conflict the group's interests should be dominant. In this case one merely advocates a collectivist morality. (2) One may assert that the group's interest is dominant, if not now, then at least 'in the long run', even without being imposed on its individual members who may all act against it. In this case, one expresses a fatalist view or a prophecy about things to come; Popper has tried to show (in his *Poverty of Historicism*) the barrenness and unscientific character of such prophecies. (3) One may assert that in case of conflict the group's interest is latent, and comes into play only when the group's members' interests alter so as to coincide with the group's interest. This is the pattern of many widespread popular beliefs. As a naive example we may take the myth that when all Jews keep the Sabbath the Messiah will come. The newest theory which follows this pattern is that the leader discovers the destiny of his group; this is but a variation on the book of *Exodus*. All the variants which follow this pattern are obviously metaphysical; its main interest, I think, lies in its relation to a specific moral philosophy of the individual's responsibility to the collective. (This kind of morality falls neither under the heading of collectivist morality

nor under the heading of individualistic morality – the two kinds of morality discussed in Popper's *Open Society*.) (4) The only other alternative seems to be this: the group's interest always and necessarily manifests itself in, and acts through, some individuals' aims and interests. One may state a scientific theory while following this pattern, by specifying the individuals whose aims are identical with the group's interests and by specifying these individuals' aims and circumstances. But then the assertion about the identity of these individuals' and the group's interests which that theory would contain, will be redundant in the sense that the testability or the explanatory power of that theory will not diminish with the omission of this assertion. If this assertion is omitted the theory will accord with the pattern of institutionalist individualism, but if this assertion is not omitted one may be tempted to stick to it when the scientific part of the theory is refuted. For, being unscientific, this assertion is irrefutable and can be safely upheld, though this amounts to dogmatism. I shall now discuss two examples of this kind of holism, Marxism and Functionalism.

What Marx said about class interest is hardly open to rational argument and is thus metaphysical, while his assertions concerning the way class interest manifests itself in the individual's action are open to criticism and are scientific. For example, one can criticize Marx by pointing out that a worker's interest does not always coincide with that of his fellow worker, and adduce empirical examples to this effect. Of course, one may dismiss such criticism as irrelevant on the grounds that only the workers' 'short-run' interests can conflict, but not their 'long-run' interests. This is the attitude of those who are determined to uphold the metaphysical part of Marx's view dogmatically, even at the expense of ignoring the scientific part of Marx's view. Yet, obviously, it is the scientific part which is more interesting and more important.

Furthermore this attitude may easily lead to a collectivist morality. For, by admitting that the class interest may clash with the ('short-run') interest upon which its members act, one's views come very close to collectivist morality, and they become completely so when priority is explicitly given to the class interest itself. Thus, Marxist collectivist morality begins with blaming workers for not behaving in accord with Marx's predictions.

My second example is from current social anthropology. I mention it diffidently, because I am not sufficiently familiar with modern anthropological studies. I understand that in some interpretations functionalism is viewed as the attempt to show how the social-group's interest of self-preservation is manifest in the compatibility of different social roles, when these coincide either in any one person or in any one situation. The scientific part of this approach consists of a variety of specific assumptions of the compatibility between specific social roles and of the critical

examination of these assumptions, and is quite independent of any views concerning the group's interest. In particular it is independent of the metaphysical view that a group's interest is manifest in the compatibility of social roles. This metaphysical view leads to the dogma that compatibility must exist and to the corollary that there can never be any ('endogenous') social causes of social change, so that only 'alien' bodies or factors can cause social change. Gellner's excellent criticism of this dogma³ seems to me to be quite unanswerable. My point here is that this dogma stems from holism and is quite redundant: the parts of functionalism which are reasonable and interesting are entirely independent of it.

The same may be said about Gellner's criticism of the functionalist doctrine of survival. According to this doctrine social relics do not exist: no social institution survives its function: if it exists today it must have a function today, and this function will explain and justify its existence independently of its history. In my own view there are two strong methodological points behind the functionalist doctrine of survival. The first is a methodological criticism of the approach which was widespread before the rise of functionalism ('historism', about which see p. 137): the assumption that an institution once existed is not an explanation of its existence now, that is to say, of its survival. The second is the methodological rule of attempting to explain a seeming social relic by assuming it to be something of contemporary significance. We do not know which institution is a social relic and which is functioning, and we should investigate such questions with open minds. Yet these two sound rules concerning survivals can easily be exaggerated and turned into the claim that social relics never exist and that history does not matter at all. This is almost identical with the view that all institutions operate with perfect harmony, and withstand any external disturbances by quick and efficient adaptation at the expense of the quick elimination of institutions whose services are no longer required.

The metaphysical and arch-conservative character of this holistic view are quite obvious, and the exaggerations it contains well deserve Gellner's criticism. This criticism led Gellner to pose the problems of the explanation of survivals and of the place of history in social explanation, problems which, I suggest, are capable of solution in terms of Popper's situational logic. First, situational logic allows for the existence of social relics, as well as for the explanation of their survival. For instance, we may explain the survival of an obsolete law as being due to the legislative body's being overworked, or due to respect for the printed letter. (Obsolete laws sometimes become significant just because they were never formally abolished and because some people

³ E. Gellner, 'Time and Theory in Social Anthropology', *Mind*, LXVII, April, 1958, 182-202; reprinted in Gellner, *Cause and Meaning in the Social Sciences*, London 1973, pp. 88-106.

discover them and use them according to the logic of their situations.) Secondly, though it is clearly unsatisfactory to explain the existence of an institution merely by assuming its existence in the past, this assumption may be an ingredient in a satisfactory explanation. Situational logic brings into the explanation of the existence of an institution its immediate history, which constitutes the circumstances of individuals. Given the institutional arrangement of any one period, we can try to explain its preservation, or reform, or abolition, in the next period, in terms of rational or purposeful behaviour. Thus, by eliminating group-interest, we have all that is reasonable in functionalism without being confined to 'static' models only.

To conclude, a holistic theory either has no explanatory power, or else it has explanatory power which it would retain when the holistic element in it is eliminated. Yet if the holistic element of the theory is retained, particularly after its scientific element is empirically refuted, then the holistic element leads its adherents to obscurantism and perhaps to collectivist morality. This (as I understand it) is Popper's argument against holism - quite apart from his (distinct) interests to societies or to social institutions - against attributing metaphysical conviction that societies and social institutions, though they do exist, have no (distinct or primary) interests.

6

In this section I shall criticize psychologicistic individualism or individualistic psychology or simply psychologism (since I shall not discuss holistic psychologism this abbreviation can hardly cause any confusion). As in the previous section, my criticism will be methodological rather than metaphysical.

The metaphysical difference between institutionalism and psychologism somewhat resembles the difference between a drawing and a pointillist painting which contains only coloured dots but looks *as if* it contains lines. Psychologism admits institutions into the picture of society in the same manner in which the pointillist admits lines into his painting - as mere illusions created by oversight of details. In this section I shall discuss not this metaphysical view, but the methodology based on it.

Before coming to that I should point out, in fairness to some adherents of psychologism, that originally psychologism was not a programme to explain social phenomena but an attempt to design the ideal rational society.

The origin of psychologism seems to me to be the application of Bacon's theory of knowledge to social and political problems. Bacon explained the ability to contribute to scientific progress purely psychologically: an individual possesses this ability only if his mind is in its natural state - only

if his mind is free from superstition. And superstition is the result of impatience and self-flattery: impatience leads to guessing and self-flattery leads to self-deception which makes it impossible to get rid of one's original guess however false it may be and in spite of all refutations. This being so, he said, science can develop *only* if we forget all past superstitions and start by observing facts as they are. Bacon thus explained social phenomena psychologically: ancient science was due to man's natural open-mindedness; the Mediaeval darkness was due to man's self-deception; and modern science is due to forgetting Mediaeval superstitions. Obviously the application of these views to social, political, and legal problems is highly radicalist (especially since they contain the demand that we should start afresh). Being conscious of this, and being a conservative, Bacon repeatedly dissuaded his readers from attempting to apply his views to social and legal studies. Yet as soon as his views were accepted as the explanation of Newton's incredible success, they led to the radicalism of the eighteenth century. All past institutions were dismissed as irrational together with all past views on which they rested; these views were declared to be sheer superstitions. The institution known as modern science was viewed not as an institution but as the result of the abolition of the previous (institutionalized) learning (especially the teaching in Church institutions) and reversion to man's natural capacity to learn. Similarly, the hope for social reform was the hope not that institutions would be replaced by better ones but that they be abolished and give rise to an institutionless society of (enlightened) natural men who are able to forward their natural interests in the best manner.

Practically all the leading thinkers of the eighteenth century agreed that the existence of bad institutions vitally depended on people's irrational and even superstitious acceptance of them. 'Nothing appears more surprising', says Hume (in his Essay on *The First Principles of Government*), 'to those who consider human affairs with a philosophic eye, than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few, and the implicit submission with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers. When we enquire by what means this wonder is effected, we shall find that as force is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion.' Hume emphasized that the opinion of the governed, by which tyranny is maintained, is quite irrational. Although he opposed the use of the myth of the social contract as a justification of existing institutions (in his essay on *The Original Contract*), he himself endorsed a less rosecoloured version of it (in his essay on *The Origin of Government*) in order to explain the existence of irrational institutions like tyranny. He attributed some (military) rationality to the act of instituting a government, and explained its survival (in peace time) after it had lost its original function by the subjects' irrational force of habit. Rousseau had a similar view of tyranny. 'The

strongest is never strong enough to be always the master unless he transfers his strength into right, and obedience into duty', he wrote in his *Social Contract* (Bk. I, ch. III). Yet he was more concerned to stress the irrationality of accepting the right of the strongest 'whose sole result is a mass of inexplicable nonsense', than to explain existing social circumstances. Similarly, Adam Smith had no intention to explain slavery on rational lines; he considered it to be 'absurd' and the most inefficient and expensive form of labour; at most he was willing to explain it as rooted in people's ignorance and prejudice.

Thus, the original view behind modern psychologism is the eighteenth-century theory according to which almost all previous institutions were 'a mass of inexplicable nonsense'. 'The humanist thinkers of the Enlightenment', writes Watkins,⁴ 'regarded history as a long record of unnecessary suffering; but they repudiated the doctrine of original sin and attributed the suffering partly to physical causes which might be revealed by science and controlled by technology, and partly to superstition and ignorance, products of bad education which, they said, had rendered man's natural goodness impotent'. Existing institutions are rooted in 'bad education'; 'human nature' is at the root of the perfectly rational future society. The idea that most existing institutions are inexplicable with the aid of the rationality principle (2(a)) led to the condemnation of these institutions, not of the principle. Only the ideal liberal Utopia can be fully explained by the rationality principle, for this society is perfectly rational as in it human nature operates unimpeded by institutions, or by the 'mass of inexplicable nonsense' on which institutions are based.

According to the humanist thinkers of the Enlightenment, not only the ideal society but also its rise can be explained purely psychologically – by reference to human nature alone: once people see that the existing order is superstitious they will cease to accept it, by which very act they will have created the ideal society. This naïve view was attacked from two sides, the traditionalist and the extreme radicalist. The traditionalists defended society's need for some blind obedience ('superstition' is the individualists' name for the same). The extreme radicalists demanded that the state (or some other institution) should use radical means to eradicate bad institutions and the superstitious education on which they rest. The traditionalists naturally moved towards holism as did those extreme radicalists who noticed that what they demanded was no longer the abolition of all institutions but rather the establishment of some new institutions in order to destroy some older ones: they started to view the scene as a battlefield in which old and new institutions (or classes, or social forces) were struggling. (L. Pearce Williams' very interesting paper concerning the debate about the reform of education immediately after the French

⁴ 'The Strange Face of Evil', *The Listener*, September 30, 1954. Vol. 52. pp. 522-3.

Revolution⁵ presents a detailed historical example of such a development.) The eighteenth-century psychological programme of planning a future liberal Utopia ended with its failure to produce this Utopia after the French Revolution. It has two intellectual heirs, however: the anarchist movement, and the nineteenth-century psychological programme of explaining existing social phenomena, whose chief promoters were Comte and Mill.

The anarchist movement differed little from its predecessor: it merely added that the eradication of past institutions must be complete or else it will be useless. This is how the anarchists explained the failure of the French Revolution: it was not sufficiently radical. The psychological movement of Comte and Mill took quite a different turn. Admittedly there is no other difference between the eighteenth-century psychology and the nineteenth-century psychology but that the one was a programme to design the perfectly rational society and the other was a programme to explain existing societies: both had at their disposal nothing but physical circumstances and the psychology which is equally applicable to *all* individuals – namely, human nature.

Yet the difference between designing and explaining is crucial. For the nineteenth-century psychological programme reflects a compromise between the desire to explain social entities which could no longer be explained away and the traditional (mistaken) individualistic aversion to the admission of social entities (or 'holistic entities' as Gellner calls them).⁶ This in itself does not explain the persistence of the idea that only human nature should be used in the explanation of social phenomena. The persistence of this idea can be explained by reference to other opinions which were common to both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century individualists. Common to both groups is the view that a satisfactory theory must be an assertion about the essence of the phenomena explained by that theory; and the essence of all human phenomena is human nature. Common to both groups (especially with regard to Mill) is also the idea that explaining a social set-up as rational (2(b)) is tantamount to justifying it. Thus, for purely intellectual reasons psychology, apart from its anarchist branch, lost its revolutionary fervour. I shall not discuss these two ideas which rendered psychology a programme to explain rather than design; rather, I shall provide the reason for rendering the programme to explain so austere: there is a stronger argument for allowing only human nature to enter our explanation of social phenomena: including

⁵ L. Pearce Williams, 'The Politics of Science in the French Revolution', Paper Ten, *Critical Problems in the History of Science*, Ed. Marshall Clagett, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1959.

⁶ 'Explanations in History', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. vol. 30, 1956. Reprinted in *Theories of History*, ed. Patrick Gardiner, 1959. See also 'Reply to Mr. Watkins', printed at the very end of that volume.

the psychology of people as we know them would seem to make our explanation too easy, *ad hoc*, and uninteresting. It would enable us to explain monogamy by the monogamous tendencies of the individual members of a monogamous society, and polygamy by the polygamous tendencies of the individual members of the polygamous society. This unsatisfactory mode of explanation will be ruled out if we allow only human nature to be used as the psychological element in our explanation. For, by definition, human nature is common to all members of mankind. For the sake of clarity I shall call the kind of psychology which has only human nature at its disposal 'traditional psychology' and the opposite kind of psychology 'vulgar psychology'.

Traditional psychology is a daring programme. It is the suggestion that we should not be satisfied with any explanation of social phenomena unless this explanation is an assertion about human nature and material circumstances. Hence, it is the suggestion that we should explain the variety of social phenomena by assuming a variety of material circumstances (since human nature is unalterable). But many social phenomena and their varieties hardly depend on material circumstances – take language as an obvious example. Hence traditional psychology seems to be untenable. The only way out of this difficulty is the suggestion that we should explain today's variety of social phenomena not by reference to the varieties of today's material circumstances, but by reference to the varieties of material circumstances of today as well as of yesterday. (This renders the psychological programme a version of historicism, namely of the programme to explain phenomena by relating their history.)

But this would not help either. If we want to explain a child's adaptation to an institution without taking as given the fact that its parents are adapted to it, we have to explain the parents' being adapted to it by reference to their childhood. This regress will be an unsuccessful attempt to eliminate statements about institutions from our own explanation, unless we assume that there was at least one moment in the society's history in which only material environment and human nature determined rational action. Hence traditional psychology is pushed to the unintended view that every society had a definite historical beginning. This view is dismissed by Popper as 'the methodological myth of the social contract' (*Open Society*, ii, 93).

The methodological myth of the social contract seems to be employed in the creation of various kinds of historical myths. Sometimes these are stories about collective events which left their impressions on the further developments of the societies in which they occurred. A famous example of such a myth is Freud's description of the beginning of society and the creation of the Oedipus complex as the outcome of a specific event of a collective father-killing. Other myths are stories about strong individuals who left their impact on posterity. A famous example of this is Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-*

Worship. For my part, I view Carlyle's effort as an attempt to solve a problem within the framework of individualism but in a manner designed to render it as indistinguishable from holism as possible; his solution was intended to be a bridge along which one could easily pass from the individualists' to the holists' camp. Stripped of its holistic hero-worship, however, Carlyle's mythology would be a part of a more general discussion of the contribution of past events to the shaping of our present societies. And the unheroic impression which Cleopatra's nose is alleged to have made on poor Antony is as good an instance of such an event as the heroic entry of Carlyle's Odin onto the historical and social stage.

I do not wish to challenge the prominence which Cleopatra's pretty nose has in the historiographic literature ever since Pascal blamed it for mixing in Roman politics, but rather to claim that it is too far-fetched as a part of an explanation of today's social set-up. If the psychological programme is to be carried out successfully, we have not only to trace the historical origin of a specific social characteristic, but also to explain how the effect of a historical event has persisted through the ages. Hence, the explanation of today's social set-up must contain a description of yesterday's set-up and an assumption which explains the emergence of today's set-up from yesterday's set-up. But these two assumptions are quite sufficient, and we should therefore start with them, although, of course, having provided an explanation of today's set-up, we may try to explain yesterday's set-up (and its roots in that of the day before yesterday).

And yet it should be noticed, perhaps, that unlike holism, traditional psychology sometimes does lead to theories which are open to criticism and even to empirical criticism. Thus, psychological attempts to explain some social events by stressing the roles of certain individuals (rather than of the institutional set-up) in history, has provoked admirable criticisms such as Tolstoy's (in *War and Peace*). Similarly, Mill's contention that economics is based only on the universal disposition to get rich, though uninteresting, is at least criticizable. Indeed it was criticized by pointing out that the competitive system does not follow from the disposition to get rich, and that economic competition is not universal. This criticism led to the psychological claim that primitive people, who do not have competition (and are therefore primitive), do not compete because of climatic conditions which make people lazy or contented etc. Yet competition has been found even among some primitive people, though not the competition Mill knew.

Difficulties of this kind are not due to some specific errors but due to the poverty of the tools which the traditional psychological programme offers to its adherents. This can be seen more intuitively, perhaps, if we look at an imaginary future than if we look at the past. Assume that the future of mankind is going to be better. Since, ultimately, all the tools the adherents of

psychologism can use in order to explain (or predict) this future are again the unalterable human nature and physical conditions, they are almost bound to say that, if the future is going to be better *in any sense*, it is going to be better because of some sort of improvement of our physical conditions – the development of science and technology. This is why the Utopianists of the Age of Reason lay such stress on the advancement of learning, as Watkins rightly remarks (see p. 162). This is why Robert Owen expressed his optimism by claiming that the improvement of man's material conditions is going to cause improvement of man's general conditions: according to traditional psychologism ultimately there is almost nothing else which can cause any improvement. Nowadays the error of this view is, regrettably perhaps, only too obvious. We know that the future of mankind depends less on technological success and more on our ability or inability to create effective institutional means for preventing the misuse of our technological achievements.

So much about traditional psychologism. Unlike traditional psychologism, which offers too few tools for the explanation of social phenomena, vulgar psychologism offers too many tools. It allows one to attribute to individuals all the characteristics of the society to which they belong. It is not only *ad hoc*, but also untenable, as it allows one to assume conflicting characteristics in order to explain conflicting institutions, institutionalized conflicts, and other undesired social phenomena. For example, adherents of vulgar psychologism would and did explain unemployment by claiming that workers are lazy. This approach, when pushed far enough, becomes plainly ridiculous and ceases to be individualistic, as it would render the rationality principle (2(a)) inapplicable to messy situations.

Adherents of vulgar psychologism can hardly be expected to have discussed this criticism explicitly. Nonetheless, one may view certain ideas as attempts to mitigate it, as, for instance, the following suggestions. (1) Unemployment is desired by *some* individuals. (2) Unemployment is not yet understood for want of factual information. (3) Unemployment is an *unintended* consequence of rational behaviour.

According to the first suggestion it is not the unemployed who want to have unemployment, but *some* other people. This is a version of 'the conspiracy theory of society': every social evil is desired and brought about by *some* wicked people. This theory is entirely metaphysical. It allegedly explains (evil) social phenomena by attributing (evil) intentions to some people but it does not tell us why these sinister people rather than well-wishers enforce their intentions on others. The statement that those who are engaged in wars are wicked is an unsatisfactory explanation of wars; the statement that the industrial magnates love war (or money or power) is no explanation of wars unless one adds to it assumptions concerning the social circumstances which

makes them capable of imposing their wills on others. (This criticism is due to Marx.) Hence, any admissible explanation of social evils by conspiracy assumes the existence of some previous social circumstances, which contained some other social evils. The suggestion that those can be explained by previous conspiracies would lead to a rather funny version of the methodological myth of the social contract.

According to the second suggestion, before we can attempt to explain any social phenomena, we simply have to collect *indiscriminately* all factual information about all individuals involved in the social setting in which the phenomena took place, and when sufficient information about them is known, their social setting will be known and the phenomena in question explained. In order to understand unemployment, it is suggested, we must know much more about the workers, their employers, their organizers, etc. etc. I shall call this view 'inductivist psychologism'.

Inductivist psychologism may be the view that the multitude of facts will array themselves into a picture just like the points in the pointillist painting do. This would only raise the question of *why* do the facts fall into pattern; the increasingly detailed description is not an explanation; on the contrary, the more facts we describe, the more we want explanations. Moreover, the more facts we describe, the less will they fall into pattern by themselves. Those who want to collect more facts in order to explain a given fact usually admit all this, but they claim that we can find a good explanation only if we have knowledge of sufficiently many facts to *adduce* this explanation from – according to the Baconian method of *induction*.

According to the Baconian view the proper method of inquiry is to collect many facts, to adduce from them theories, to adduce from these theories more general theories (the *axiomata media*), and to go on increasing the generality of our theories until we arrive at the most general theory – to the essence of things. The general theory will explain the less general theories in succession and, ultimately, it will explain the original facts from which it is adduced. Obviously, then, since the essence of human phenomena is human nature, advocating the application of the Baconian method to human phenomena seems to be advocating traditional psychologism. (Alternatively, we may join Durkheim and declare social wholes observable.) Moreover, according to Baconian inductivism raising problems is dangerous since it prevents one from observing facts indiscriminately. Hence inductivists should not bother about how the general theory of human nature would explain the less general theories (the *axiomata media*), nor need they bother about how it would explain undesired social institutions. The faith in the possibility of adducing more and more general theories from observed facts reassures one that the most general theory of human nature will ultimately appear and that then all will be quite clear. The only trouble with this faith is that it is based on logical

errors.

The third suggestion is Max Weber's individualistic *ideal type* approach. It is the suggestion that we should describe the average or typical member of a given society or social group by attributing to him *some* typical social characteristics and by trying to *explain* (or predict) his having other typical social characteristics (especially the undesired ones) as the *unintended consequences* of his rational or purposeful behaviour in his typical environment.

Weber and his followers have succeeded in applying his approach fruitfully, producing along its lines interesting theories which are open to critical argument. Weber's approach *may* be viewed as a devulgarized version of vulgar psychologism. Hence, at least one version of psychologism is fruitful. However, I wish to stress two points in this connexion. First, Weber's own appraisal of his approach seems to be that it is an improved version of traditional psychologism, not of vulgar psychologism. Secondly Weber's approach is defective in its being applicable only to a narrow range of problems.

As to the first point, it explains the function of Weber's repulsive theory of the *charisma*. According to this theory the origin of any ideal type is a historical individual who had strong magical hypnotic powers ('*charisma*' is Weber's term for these powers) which he used in order to force his friends and acquaintances to imitate him. Now this theory seems to be a historical explanation of the diversity of societies (or of ideal types) by reference to human nature alone – it is yet another version of the methodological myth of the social contract. But Weber's theory of the *charisma* is not individualistic: according to it the rise of the ideal type is not a result of individuals' rational or purposeful behaviour but of their being hypnotized. Moreover, the *charisma* theory is criticizable in the same way as the conspiracy theory: although *charisma* (like conspiracy) is a (small) part of social life, the *charisma* theory (like the conspiracy theory) is no explanation as yet.

Ignoring Weber's myth of the *charisma*, we remain with two other alternative ways of interpreting Weber's individualistic ideal type approach. The one way is to view it as an improved version of vulgar psychologism and the other is to view it as a version of institutionalism. According to the institutionalist interpretation of Weber's approach only the institutionalized characteristics may be attributed to the ideal type, while according to the psychologistic approach there is no basis for the distinction between the institutionalized and the uninstitutionalized characteristics of the members of the society in question. Since the whole point about the characteristics of the ideal type is that they persist, one can clearly see that the application of Weber's approach will be more successful and interesting if we attribute to the ideal type only institutional characteristics. This is what Watkins makes of

Weber's theory. He emphasizes⁷

that the personality of a man in society comprises dispositions both of a more private and temperamental kind, and of a more public and institutional kind. Only certain individuals are disposed to weep during the death-scene in Othello, but all policemen are disposed to blow their whistles, under certain circumstances, and any Speaker in the House of Commons is disposed to disallow parliamentary criticism of exercises of the Prerogative. And these more public and institutional dispositions, which may vary very little when one man undertakes another's role, can be abstracted from the total, variegated flux of dispositions, and so provide the social scientist with a fairly stable subject-matter.

Now I fully agree with this keen observation of Watkins', but I have to stress that though it is a fair and commonsensical comment on Weber's approach, it is not a part of it. The comment explains why this approach was successful; but those who apply this approach need not know why it is successful and therefore they have no need to mention institutions even though the characteristics which they attribute to their ideal types happen to be institutional. The advantage of speaking of (institutional) characteristics of the ideal type, instead of speaking of institutions (and of institutional roles) proper, is rather plain: this mode of speaking evades the problem of whether institutions exist (1(a)), and, if they exist, whether they have distinct aims and interests of their own (4). In other words, the whole advantage of Weber's approach is that it can be viewed as psychological and it can be viewed as institutionalistic. For those who have decided upon these issues, this advantage of Weber's approach disappears, while its disadvantages, the great limitations upon its range of applicability, remain. Briefly, they are these.

As Watkins has pointed out, Weber's approach allows one to attribute to the typical individual only public and institutional characteristics, so that it does not enable us to explain satisfactorily effects of detailed characteristics of one prominent individual and other detailed events of (social) history: Weber's approach ties us too much to the typical. This, it seems quite obvious, leads to further and much more serious limitations. Cf. the following remark of Talcott Parsons, in his edition of Max Weber's *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (1947), which is appended to a note by Weber referring to an intended chapter on revolutions (p. 354n.): 'no systematic account of revolutions is available ... in Weber's published works'. It seems that Parsons noted that although Weber was very interested in social

⁷ 'Ideal Types and Historical Explanation', *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 3, 9, 1952, p. 40, reprinted in *Readings in the Philosophy of Science*, edited by H. Feigl and M. Brodbeck, N.Y., 1953, p. 741, and in J. O'Neill, ed., *Modes of Individualism and Collectivism*, London, 1973.

changes, he rarely discussed them, being methodologically handicapped; cp. *ibid.*, p. 24. Parsons is in favour of using more boldly holistic ideas where Weber's individualistic ideas are inapplicable. Weber's approach leaves no room for sociologically significant yet untypical characteristics (such as the more abstract institutions which leave no mark on any typical individual) and the untypical cases of specific and unique institutional reforms. At most it allows one to assume (without debate) changes which constitute the emergence of a new society (i.e. of new ideal types). It allows us to explain social evils as unintended consequences of purposeful behaviour, but it does not allow room for purposeful institutional reform. Consequently it is inapplicable even to the case of the typical reformer of institutions. And all this is in exchange for not having to mention institutions explicitly!

Weber's approach is on the borderline between psychologism and institutionalism. At most it can be made to appear psychological. But we need not insist on this point. Even if it were psychological it would not render psychologism a satisfactory programme. It seems incredible that intended social reform – quite a commonplace in Weber's days – could not in his time be placed satisfactorily in any methodological framework. The reason for this, I suggest, is the universal and tacit acceptance of the proposition (4) that if institutions exist, they are things with independent aims, interests and destinies. Weber's approach was certainly the best at the time when the tacit acceptance of this proposition caused a confusion between individualism and psychologism; it is better to evade a confusion than to succumb to it; but it is still better to clear it up and to identify the error upon which it is based.

7

In this section I shall try to defend institutional-individualism from the methodological angle by showing that it does not suffer from the central methodological difficulties which the two traditional approaches encounter.

The main problems for holists concern the relations between the social aims and the aims of individuals. Since, according to institutional-individualism, social aims do not exist, it does not raise these problems. The main difficulty of psychologism stems from the impossibility of explaining different social set-ups psychologically. Admitting institutions as an element in sociological explanation, institutional-individualism does not encounter this difficulty.

I shall now briefly argue that the two traditional approaches do not enable us to explain the presence of such intended institutional reform, and they do not even enable us to explain the absence of reform.⁸

⁸ Watkins, 'Historical Explanation in the Social Sciences', *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 7, 30, 1957, p. 112 n., reprinted in *Theories of History*, ed. Patrick Gardiner, 1959, pp. 509–10 n, and in O'Neill, *op. cit.*, n. 7 above.

It is obvious from general considerations that conscious institutional reform cannot be explained along either of the two traditional lines. For, according to holism, any change of an institution is a natural change – be it growth or decay – and according to psychological individualism institutional reform is but the unintended consequence of rational or purposeful action (since institutions as such do not exist). No doubt there is much truth in each of these descriptions, or rather in their combination.

'Only a minority of social institutions are consciously designed,' writes Popper (*Open Society*, ii, 93), 'while the vast majority have just "grown" as the undesigned results of human actions ... and we can add that even most of the successfully designed ... do not turn out according to plan ...'

Yet very many institutions are consciously designed, and for certain definite purposes; and this is inexplicable along the traditional lines. Moreover, as almost all institutions may act as a constraint on some persons in some instances, they are always prone to induce these persons to attempt to reform them. In cases in which it is obvious that reform would be costly and lead to little benefit, one would hardly raise the question of reform; and yet, obvious as the answer to it may be, as long as the question of reform is not *a priori* ruled out, our discussion is not quite on traditional lines.

Let us take an example of how an obvious case of the absence of reform leads to mystification because holism leaves no room to discuss even the absence of reform. Let us consider Durkheim's idea that lawbreakers serve society by reminding its members of the existence of the laws which they break. This functionalist idea seems to be highly unsatisfactory, because it seems to be the result of a determination to explain any event as one which contributes towards social cohesion in the face of schism and disintegration. And yet somehow one tends to admit that there is more to Durkheim's idea than just this. To my surprise I found that some students of sociology are still unable to state simply the reasonable element in Durkheim's idea. It is, of course, the truism that punishment *may* be used as a deterrent; and that when it is a successful deterrent it strengthens the law. But this is by no means universally the case. Therefore, a full explanation of a specific case of a crime followed by a punishment which strengthens the law has to be an explanation of the following facts: that the law was broken (rather than universally observed); that the criminal was punished (rather than ignored or rewarded); and that the punishment acted as a deterrent (and was neither ignored nor opposed by the public). Parts of the explanation are often so obvious that they are not stated explicitly; but while the explanation is restated in a holistic fashion these parts are silently omitted.

To take another example, we know that there exist no public telephone

directories in Moscow. The following simple explanation of this fact may be true or false but it is quite open to rational argument: the authorities fear that telephone directories will be used by prospective reformers ('counter-revolutionaries') in order to communicate and organize a reform movement. The unintended consequences of the authorities' behaviour are very interesting, especially for those who wish to know under what conditions such highly centralized control will lead to a complete collapse of the social system. Thus, our explanation of this society and its ability or inability to remain unaltered for long necessarily contains a discussion of possible changes and prospective reformers.

The same examples will show the inadequacy of psychologism (in all its versions). Take punishment again. What distinguishes it (at least in democratic societies) from personal revenge is, according to some adherents of psychologism, the consent which the judge's norms receive from many individuals. This explanation is refuted by any case of punishment which comes after public demand for reform of the law upon which that punishment is based but before the reform is implemented. The adherent of psychologism may now try to modify his theory, but he will have to modify it while taking account of the situation in which the refuting instance has occurred, thus risking his psychologism altogether. This point will be more obvious when we take our second example of stringent central control over all the citizens' activities.

The existence of such a central control is the most eloquent evidence, if evidence is wanted, for the view that personally the citizens subject to it are highly disposed to reform, and yet it is the (institutional) control which makes reform less practicable. Thus, although *personally* Hungarians nowadays are by and large more disposed to reform than Britons, *institutionally* Britain is more disposed to reform than Hungary. Admittedly the increase of individual people's discontent will tempt a prospective rebel in Hungary to act, but his action, his attempt to institutionalize this discontent, is psychologically inexplicable. Psychologism blocks the way to the explanation of the fact that success in creating institutions expressing and co-ordinating the existing discontent constitutes a successful revolution or a major step towards it.

Admitting such criticisms, some adherents of psychologism view institutional reform not as the spread of new attitudes but as the simultaneous occurrence of many individuals' decisions which are caused by the spread of the new attitudes. This view is nothing but the admission that psychologism leaves no room for the explanation of the fact that individuals choose to act in a co-ordinated fashion.

The adherent of psychologism will claim, perhaps, that the boot is on the other foot. He will admit that co-ordination exists, but he will want to explain this co-ordination (psychologically) and not take it for granted as the

institutionalist would. This retort is not void of substance, for institutionalism does allow one to take the existing institutional co-ordinations for granted. Yet ultimately the retort is based on an error. The institutionalist programme is neither to assume the existence of *all* co-ordinations nor to explain *all* of them, but rather to *assume* the existence of *some* co-ordination in order to *explain* the existence of *some* other co-ordinations. It is an error to assume that the only satisfactory explanation of institutions is by assumptions which say nothing about institutions. Admittedly such an explanation, if it were possible, would be highly desirable (as it would be simpler and thus more open to critical argument). But there exists a very obvious reason which makes it impossible to produce such explanation. It is what I would call 'Popper's rational principle of institutional reform', and it is this. However bad the existing institutional co-ordinations are, a prospective reformer will try his best to make use of them in his attempt to reform them or to abolish them. Therefore, the existing social co-ordinations will constitute an important factor in determining the rational or purposeful behaviour of the prospective reformer, in determining the likelihood of success, the cost of the reform, and the expected benefit from it.

In my previous two sections I have tried to argue that all reasonable explanations within the holistic and psychologicistic frameworks can be formulated within Popper's institutionalist-individualist methodology - situational logic. In the present section I have gone further and stated that almost all reasonable explanations of social phenomena, when fully stated, cannot be fitted into the previous frameworks but can be fitted into situational logic. In brief, almost all serious social thinkers have employed situational logic even though Popper was the first to formulate it. This last assertion of mine may be true or false, but it is certainly no more inconsistent than the widely accepted assertion that Euclid used rules of mathematical logic (like *reductio ad absurdum*) long before mathematical logicians formulated them. I should even stress that adherents of psychologicism were often ardent reformers of social institutions, just as Aristotle often used inferences which cannot form part of his logic. Although the employment of situational logic is not new, its formulation is. And it forms a great advance relative to the untenable holistic scheme and the untenable psychologicistic scheme, and even relative to Weber's acceptable though narrow scheme of individualistic ideal type.

This section concerns the nature or society and social and political institutions as such, and is therefore metaphysical. According to *holism* society is a *super-*

individual; according to *psychologicistic individualism* society is the *sum-total of individuals' interactions*; according to *institutionalist-individualism* society is the *conventional means of co-ordination* between individual actions. This last view is known as contractualism or conventionalism.

A defence of any view must consist in answering the criticism launched against this view and in showing that it is preferable to all the existing alternatives to it. More one cannot do, for it is always possible that future criticism will show the unacceptability of that view and future thinking might bring about better alternatives. In accordance with this attitude, I shall now try to discuss the criticism of conventionalism or contractualism and then argue that it is preferable to holism and to psychologicism.

There exist two objections to conventionalism or contractualism: the one is that the convention or contract was never signed; the other is that while one may contract out of a convention or a contract one cannot contract out of society. The first objection is slight: conventionalism or contractualism need not entail the view that a contract was ever signed; an individual gives his implicit consent to an existing contract every time that he acts in accordance with it, even while attempting to abolish it. No one ever stops any individual from contracting out of any convention. Here proposers of the second objection (like Adam Smith) will point out that such people as policemen and magistrates see to it that no individual contracts out of the existing institutions, and that therefore institutions are not contracts. But this is an error. What an individual cannot do is to force other individuals, policemen or no policemen, to contract out of a convention. The lawbreaker is the person who, by the act of breaking a law, contracts out; if the other individuals in his society do not contract out they will try to catch and punish him in accordance with the laws (namely the conventions) which they adopt; if they contract out as well, he will not be punished, and that is all there is to it.

Undoubtedly, any individual's decision as to whether or not to contract out of any given convention may depend on the question of whether or not he thinks other individuals are tempted to contract out as well. This is how individual actions are co-ordinated, not only when they conform to a given convention but also when (as the unintended consequence of existing convention or as the result of the development of new ideas) they are highly disposed towards accepting a new convention or towards abolishing or reforming an existing convention.

What the critics of conventionalism seem to have missed is that although one person's contracting out of an institution depends on other people's choice, it is, ultimately, one's own choice. Moreover, they seem to have missed the point that when one chooses to act one does not necessarily like the conditions under which one acts. Choice is often between evils, and the

aim is to choose the lesser evil. Why anticonventionalists view the abidance by tyranny as a stronger objection to conventionalism than the willingness to die on the barricades I do not know. Both of these kinds of behaviour are – to me at any rate – profoundly puzzling. And yet only conventionalism, I think, allows for both of them; the holistic view *and* the psychological view amount to giving up hope of ever understanding them.

Totalitarians have often claimed that conventions which they contracted out of were ‘mere pieces of paper’ or mere customs, while those which suited them were ‘real’. The plain fact is that *all* conventions are ‘mere pieces of paper’ – that without agreement to abide by it any institution is void. (Otherwise these tyrants’ propaganda machines would have been quite unnecessary.) This was known already to Hume and Rousseau (see above, p. 134), and was merely smoke-screened by holistic propaganda. And yet this holistic propaganda contains a strong point which is this.

Although any convention may in principle be discarded, people do want to have some conventions; it is better to have almost any law and order (i.e. conventional co-ordination) than to have none. This anti-anarchistic contention can be used in order to explain rationally people’s abidance by tyranny without thereby justifying tyranny. For it is a poor justification of a system that it is preferable only to complete disorder. Realizing this, most of those who are subject to tyranny will try to reform it. Admittedly some people accept tyranny because their illusion that it is government by force rather than by convention leads them to expect from it more security or more efficiency. Admittedly, some people accept tyranny because they benefit from it, or hope to benefit from it, and some people accept tyranny just because they admire tyrants. But most people, I contend, abide by tyranny merely because they see no other way of keeping alive and may wait for the first opportunity to organize and overthrow it. And a significant part of this attitude is people’s realization of the bitter truth that even tyranny may be preferable to total disorder. This realization may sometimes be the product of revolutions which lead to disorder. Thus we can explain the strange history of battles against tyranny which ended by establishing much worse tyrannies, such as the French and Russian terrors: tyranny is sometimes tolerated because people realize that they have no idea of how to overthrow successfully the tyranny rather than the tyrant. Here people’s opinions enter as a major factor in the social situation; but they enter not so much as personal opinion but rather as institutional or public opinion (be it scientific or not). Of course, tyranny is not always better than total disorder. The realization that an existing tyranny is worse than disorder, however, may even lead to suicidal revolts like the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. And in any case such rare tyrannies lead to states of affairs in which the relation between masters and oppressed is that of government by brute force. Such relations, not being institutional at all, do

not enter the present discussion.

It should be noticed, then, that the three views on the nature of society are, to a large extent, views concerning human nature. To the holist man essentially participates in his group’s aim, even if he wishes to oppose it; to the psychological individualist man is essentially rational and therefore necessarily tends to use the existence of members of his species rationally, thereby entering into social relations with them. To the conventionalist man is essentially in need of some conventions; it does not matter so much whether he has this or that convention as that he needs some convention, some stability in his social life. (This explains why the result of the destruction of the social system is the population’s return to more primitive social conventions.)

The holistic view explains the existence of institutions which no one desires, by the suggestion that these institutions serve society as a whole. But holism misses the problem to be solved, which is not what is the function of these institutions, but rather why do people accept them against their will? Even if an institution is useful to society, even if it is useful to everybody, the puzzle remains: why do people abide by it while desiring to overthrow it? The holistic view cannot be disproved, but one can show that it explains nothing at all, that it may lead to historicism and dogmatism, and that it may lead to an unacceptable moral outlook.

The psychological view explains the changes of social organizations by changes in people’s situations and attitudes. There is truth in this explanation, but there are two arguments against the view that this is the whole explanation. First, individuals’ attitudes concern not only individuals but also their social organization. Society is not a pointillist picture just because people’s aims happen to be co-ordinated by nature; society is a picture because people want it to be one, because people are ready to change their attitudes, in a give-and-take fashion or by a civil war, but in order to create or to alter this or that picture. The second argument is this. Institutions are not just the reflection of the psychology of the majority of their participants. (Two identical groups of individuals in identical surroundings, but with somewhat different conventions or rules of behaviour, will develop very differently from each other not only socially but also psychologically.) As Russell said,⁹ ‘institutions mould character and character transforms institutions. Reform in both must march hand in hand’.

Before concluding this section I wish to draw attention to an interesting scientific theory which incorporates the conventionalist or contractualist assumption which I have described above. It is M. Banton’s view concerning the problem of racial prejudices in Britain (*White and Coloured*, 1959). The traditional psychological approach to race relations is inapplicable here where

⁹ Bertrand Russell, *Portraits From Memory*, Reflections on my Eightieth Birthday.

the rapid emergence of a coloured section in British society has created the problem before widespread prejudices and emotional attitudes could emerge. (The uselessness of holism here need hardly be mentioned.) An important ingredient in Banton's explanation is the assumption that this rapid emergence of a coloured section in British society has caused a serious gap in the body of social conventions which had somehow to be closed rather quickly, particularly because British society is highly conventionalized. I cannot discuss Banton's interesting theory here; I mention it as an example of the application of conventionalism in proposing a specific sociological explanation.

To conclude this section I shall repeat that institutions can be explained as inter-personal means of co-ordination, as attitudes which are accepted conventionally or by agreement. Not that an agreement was signed by those who have the attitude, but the attitude is maintained by one largely because it is maintained by many, and yet everyone is always at liberty to reconsider one's attitude and change it. This idea leaves room for the rational principle of institutional reform (see above). It accords with the classical individualistic idea that social phenomena are but the interactions between individuals. Yet it does not accord with the classical individualistic-psychological idea that this interaction depends on individuals' aims and material circumstances alone; rather it adds to these factors of interaction the existing inter-personal means of co-ordination as well as individuals' ability to use, reform, or abolish them, on their own decision and responsibility.

At this point we have to go over to Popper's programme of moralizing politics rather than politicizing morals, and to his idea that the task of social and political philosophy is the planning not of the ideal society but of the reform of the existing ones. But at this point I shall close my discussion.

EPISTEMOLOGY AND POLITICS

J. W. N. Watkins

I shall attempt to refute the idea, which goes back at least to Hume¹ of the independence of philosophical and political ideas by working out the serious political implications of Hume's empiricist account of the genesis of factual knowledge. In a lecture published in 1947 and entitled "*Philosophy and Politics*", Bertrand Russell argued that an empiricist view of knowledge does have political implications. With this I agree. But whereas he claimed that empiricism is 'the only philosophy that affords a theoretical justification of democracy in its temper of mind' (p. 20), I shall argue that empiricism, at any rate as formulated by Hume, affords a theoretical condemnation of the kind of democracy we enjoy in the West.

A Digression on Metaphysics and Morality

But before proceeding to my main task I want to dispose hurriedly of another popular argument for the logical independence of philosophy and politics, an argument which, unlike the argument from the neutrality and analyticity of philosophical statements, allows that philosophy *can* make substantive or factual or synthetic assertions of a different category from the empirical assertions of science, history and common sense, but denies that political recommendations could be derived from such philosophical assertions without committing the naturalistic fallacy. No doubt classical political philosophers usually introduced ontological or metaphysical opinions about the sort of world we live in, as well as epistemological opinions about the power and scope of human understanding, to underwrite their political recommendations. But, it will be said, every such attempt involves an illicit transition from 'is' to 'ought'.

While agreeing that prescriptive political conclusions cannot be deduced from factual metaphysical premisses alone, I hold that a political doctrine may stand in a peculiarly dependent relation to a metaphysical doctrine, so that the latter may be said to "endorse" or "sanction" the former. I shall try to show this by means of an imaginary example which will have to be

¹ See *Hume's Enquiries*, edited by Selby-Bigge, second edition, p. 147.