Economics and Philosophy, **18** (2002) 209–210 Copyright © Cambridge University Press

SYMPOSIUM ON EXPLANATIONS AND SOCIAL ONTOLOGY: INTRODUCTION

This symposium consists of three papers originally delivered at a Summer School in July 2000, organized by the Philosophy Department of the University of Rotterdam. The topic of the Summer School was *Social Ontology – after 'the Common Mind'*, the latter a reference to Philip Pettit's book of that title published by Oxford University Press in 1993.

''Social Ontology'' deals with the issue of the nature of the basic elements involved in social explanation. Can there, for example, be satisfactory explanations of social phenomena that run in terms of other social phenomena – or must all social explanation, to be fully satisfactory, offer an account of the behaviour of the individuals who compose the relevant social aggregates? If the fundamental methodological commitments of mainstream economics include ''methodological individualism'', what is it that ultimately distinguishes social explanation from purely psychological explanation, writ large?

In *The Common Mind*, Pettit attempted to deal with these questions by laying out a three-part scheme in which questions of psychology, social ontology and political theory are dealt with interdependently. He develops a position he describes as ''holistic individualism'' – that is, a position that is essentially individualist (i.e., anti-collectivist), at the level of agency, but is ''holistic'' rather than ''atomistic'' at the level of psychology. Roughly put, the thought is that, though social explanation must ultimately run in terms of individual action, the psychology of the individual agents involves appeal to rules, conventions, categories of thought and modes of deliberation that cannot be developed or sustained in isolation. This is the anti-atomist element in Pettit's construction. The object is to combine methodological individualism with a socialized account of agent deliberation.

The social ontology aspects of this enterprise involve an extension and application of the ''program model of explanation'' developed originally with Frank Jackson (see for example, the Jackson–Pettit 1990 paper in *Analysis*). In fact, this programme model does double duty in Pettit's scheme. It offers an account both of how beliefs and desires can

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266267102002018 Published online by Cambridge University Press

''program for'' an action, even though it is actually some neural profile within the brain that serves to produce that action, and of how aggregative social phenomena might programme for the individual actions that actually produce those phenomena.

The object in each of the three papers included here was to explicate and criticize Pettit's account. The Maki and Weber/Van Boewel papers deal directly with the social ontology claims. Ferejohn's paper is more concerned with the understanding of rational choice explanations and, in particular, whether, and in what sense, psychological plausibility should be seen as imposing constraints on what can pass for explanation within the rational choice theory scheme.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266267102002018 Published online by Cambridge University Press