1. Background

Methodological Individualism (MI): very roughly, the position that group-level social phenomena should be accounted for in terms of the actions, attitudes, etc. of the individual members of this group.

- Examples of social entities: classes, castes, nations, churches, bureaucracies, etc.

More specifically, Kincaid offers seven different variants of MI:

MI1. Social theories are reducible to individualist theories;
MI2. Any explanation of social phenomena must refer solely to individuals, their relations, dispositions, etc.;
MI3. Any fully adequate explanation of social phenomena must refer solely to individuals, their relations, dispositions, etc.;
MI4. Individualist theory suffices to fully explain social phenomena;
MI5. Individualist theory suffices to partially explain social phenomena;
MI6. Some reference to individuals is a necessary condition for any explanation of social phenomena;
MI7. Some reference to individuals is a necessary condition for any full explanation of social phenomena.

The punch line: Only MI7 is plausible; M1-M4, as well as MI6 are highly implausible; MI5 is unknown.

2. Reduction (MI1)

2.1. The Reductionist Argument

R1. Every social entity is either an individual or an aggregate of those individuals. (Exhaustion Principle)
R2. Once all the relevant facts about individuals are set, all of the facts about social entities are also set. (Determination Principle)
R3. If the entities in theory \( x \) are exhausted and determined by the entities in theory \( y \), then \( x \) is reducible to \( y \).

MI1. \( \therefore \) Social theories are reducible to individualist theories (From R1-R3).

2.2. Kincaid’s Critique of R1

1. If some social entities cannot be defined independently of their relations to other social entities, then not every social entity is either an individual or an aggregate of those individuals.
2. Some social entities cannot be defined independently of their relations to other social entities (e.g. ruling class.)

\( \sim R1. \) \( \therefore \) Some social entities are neither an individual, nor an aggregate of those individuals. (From 1,2)

2.3. Kincaid’s Critique of R2

1. Suppose that a worker shoots his foreman, and all of the individual facts of this action are set.
2. The shooting may be an act of terrorism, a religious conflict, a class conflict, etc.
3. Acts of terrorism, religious conflicts, etc. are social phenomena.

\( \sim R2. \) Even if all the relevant facts about individuals are set, all of the facts about social entities are not necessarily set.
2.4. *Kincaid’s Critique of R3*

1. If \( x \) is reducible to \( y \), then each statement in \( x \) has a one-to-one correspondence with a statement in \( y \).
2. Each statement about a social entity can be multiply realized by different arrangements of individuals (e.g. many different individuals standing in different relations can be bureaucracies.)
3. If \( x \) can be multiply realized by \( y \), then each statement in \( x \) stand in one-to-many correspondence with statements in \( y \), even if the entities in theory \( x \) are exhausted and determined by the entities in theory \( y \).

\[ \neg R3. \quad \therefore \text{Even if the entities in theory } x \text{ are exhausted and determined by the entities in theory } y, \text{ } x \text{ is not necessarily reducible to } y. \text{ (From 1-3)} \]

3. **The Limits of Individualistic Explanation (MI2-MI6)**

3.1. *Kincaid’s Objection to MI2*

1. If any explanation of social phenomena must refer solely to individuals, their relations, dispositions, etc., then nearly all of the explanations in anthropology, sociology, or microeconomics are wrong.
2. Some of the explanations in anthropology, sociology, or microeconomics that invoke social entities are right.

\[ \neg MI2. \quad \therefore \text{Some explanations of social phenomena must do not refer solely to individuals, their relations, dispositions, etc.} \]

3.2. *Kincaid’s Objection to MI3 & MI4*

- A *type* of \( F \) is the concept of \( F \); a *token* of \( F \) is an instance of \( F \).
  - Ex. *College* is a type; Middlebury College is a token

1. Social phenomena can be construed either as types or as tokens.
2. If they are construed as types, then individual theories suffice to explain social theories only if social theories are reducible to individual theories.
3. Social theories are not reducible to individual theories (by \( \neg R3 \) in \( \S 2 \))
4. \[ \therefore \text{Social phenomena can only be construed as tokens (From 1-3)} \]

**TE.** If social phenomena are construed as tokens, then they cannot be explained individualistically. (Token Explanation Claim)

\[ \neg MI4. \quad \therefore \text{Social phenomena cannot be explained individualistically. (From 4,5)} \]

6. If social phenomena cannot be explained individualistically, then some fully adequate explanations of social phenomena need not refer solely to individuals, their relations, dispositions, etc.

\[ \neg MI3. \quad \therefore \text{Some fully adequate explanations of social phenomena need not refer solely to individuals, their relations, dispositions, etc. (From } \neg MI4, \text{ 6)} \]

3.2.1. **The Token Explanation Claim**

1. For any social phenomenon or event \( S \), two fundamental kinds of questions are:
   a. Why did \( S \) occur, that is, what are the causal connections between the kind of social events (events involving social entities) preceding \( S \) and the onset of \( S \)?
   b. Why do these kind of events (the kind to which \( S \) belongs) occur, that is, what other kinds of antecedent social events might bring about this kind of social event?
2. Individualist explanations of social tokens cannot refer to types/kinds of social events.

**TE.** \[ \therefore \text{If social phenomena are construed as tokens, then they cannot be explained individualistically. (From 1, 2)} \]
3.3. Kincaid’s Objection to MI5

1. If individualist theory suffices to partially explain social phenomena, then there are laws of human behavior that are sufficiently strong to fully explain the individual behaviors making up a social event and that also make no reference to social entities.
2. It is unknown whether laws of this sort will be developed in future science.

∴ It is unknown whether individualist theory suffices to partially explain social phenomena. (From 1, 2)

3.4. Kincaid’s Objection to MI6

1. Some of the explanations in anthropology, sociology, or macroeconomics that invoke only social entities are right.

~MI6. ∴ Some social phenomena can be explained without reference to individuals. (From 1)

4. The Proper Role for Individualism (MI7)

1. If \( x \) and \( y \) have many structural commonalities and are at nearby levels of analysis, then a full explanation of \( x \) requires some reference to \( y \).
2. Social and individual entities have many structural commonalities (needs, interests, goals) and are at nearby levels of analysis.

MI7. Some reference to individuals is a necessary condition for any full explanation of social phenomena. (From 1, 2)