

A Millett LJ in *Stein v Blake* [1998] 1 All ER 724, 730, as the reason why the principle in *Prudential Assurance* should be followed:

B “If this action were allowed to proceed and the plaintiff were to recover for the lost value of his shareholding from the first defendant, this would reduce his ability to meet any judgment which might thereafter be obtained by the liquidators, or by any of the old companies which were not in liquidation, to the prejudice of their creditors. The plaintiff would have obtained by a judgment of the court the very same extraction of value from the old companies at the expense of their creditors that the first defendant is alleged to have obtained by fraud and deceit.”

C In *Christensen v Scott* [1996] 1 NZLR 273 the court considered that the problem of double recovery did not arise in that case as the defendants had settled the company’s claim with the knowledge that the plaintiffs’ claim was outstanding. But the court recognised that double recovery cannot be permitted and that the interests of the creditors of a company must be protected. In my opinion the resolution of the conflict between *Prudential Assurance* and *Christensen v Scott* narrows down to the issue whether, as held in the former case, the shareholder is debarred from bringing to trial an action claiming loss where such loss is merely reflective of loss suffered by the company, or whether the shareholder is entitled to proceed to trial on such a claim, it being a matter for the trial judge, if the plaintiff establishes his claim, to ensure that there is no double recovery and that creditors and other shareholders of the company do not suffer loss, which was the course which Pumfrey J held should be followed.

E My Lords, whilst in a case such as *Christensen v Scott* there may be merit in permitting an individual shareholder to sue, the decision in *Prudential Assurance* has stood in England for almost 20 years and, whilst the decision has sometimes been distinguished on inadequate grounds, it has been regarded as establishing a clear principle which the Court of Appeal has followed in other cases. I further consider that the principle has the advantage that, rather than leaving the protection of creditors and other shareholders of the company to be given by the trial judge in the complexities of a trial to determine the validity of the claim made by the plaintiff against the defendant, where conflicts of interest may arise between directors and some shareholders, or between the liquidator and some shareholders, the principle ensures at the outset of proceedings that where the loss suffered by the plaintiff is sustained because of loss to the coffers of the company, there will be no double recovery at the expense of the defendant nor loss to creditors of the company and other shareholders.

F Therefore whilst I think that this House should uphold the *Prudential Assurance* principle, I also consider that it is important to emphasise that the principle does not apply where the loss suffered by the shareholder is separate and distinct from the loss suffered by the company.

H The five heads of claim pleaded by Mr Johnson have been set out in the speech of my noble and learned friend, Lord Bingham of Cornhill. I consider that the losses claimed in heads 1, 2, 4 and 5 are separate and distinct from loss sustained by WWH and that those heads of claim should not be struck out. In respect of head 3 I am also in agreement with the opinion of Lord Bingham that because it is not a separate and distinct loss, Mr Johnson cannot claim in respect of the moneys which WWH would have paid into a

pension fund for him if those moneys had been available to it, and that that part of the claim should be struck out, but that Mr Johnson can claim in respect of enhancement of the value of the pension if the payments had been made. A

For the reasons given by Lord Bingham I would strike out Mr Johnson's claims for damages for mental distress and anxiety and for aggravated damages. Accordingly, I would allow Mr Johnson's appeal and dismiss GW's cross-appeal, save that I would strike out his claim in head 3 for pension payments (or, in the alternative, for the increase in the value of his shareholding if those pension payments had not been made), and for damages for mental distress and anxiety and for aggravated damages. I would concur in the order for costs proposed by Lord Bingham. B

**LORD MILLETT** My Lords, my noble and learned friend, Lord Bingham of Cornhill, has recounted the facts and I need not set them out again at any length. The appellant, Mr Johnson, is an entrepreneur who carried on business through a number of companies which he owned and controlled. One of them was Westway Homes Ltd ("the company"). Mr Johnson was its managing director and virtually only shareholder. The respondent firm ("the firm") is a firm of solicitors. Mr Johnson was in the habit of instructing the firm from time to time to act for him in connection with his personal affairs as well as for his various companies. C

In 1988 the company held a valuable option to buy land for development. Mr Johnson instructed the firm to exercise the option on the company's behalf. The firm accepted his instructions and served the appropriate notice, but failed to do so in a manner which was incapable of challenge by the vendor. The vendor claimed that the option had not been validly exercised, and the company was obliged to bring proceedings for specific performance against him in the Chancery Division ("the Chancery proceedings"). These were not straightforward, and although the company was ultimately successful it was unable to obtain title to the land until April 1992, that is to say more than four years after it had exercised the option. It was awarded damages and costs against the vendor, but these proved to be irrecoverable. D

The firm's failure to deal with the option in a manner which put its exercise beyond dispute caused the company substantial loss. As well as having to bear the costs of the Chancery proceedings, it sustained heavy financial loss as a result of the delay in obtaining title to the land. This loss was of two kinds. First, until the company established its title, it was unable to offer the land as security for its borrowings and so obtain a reduction in the very high interest charges it was paying. Secondly, delay in obtaining title to the land caused a corresponding delay in the commencement and completion of the development and thus in the time when the company could hope to realise any profit from the venture. As it happens, the delay frustrated the development altogether, for the collapse in the property market which took place during the currency of the Chancery proceedings made the venture unprofitable. But this was obviously not foreseeable in 1988, or Mr Johnson would not have caused the company to exercise the option and the vendor would not have resisted its claim to have done so. E

In January 1991 the company brought proceedings against the firm for professional negligence. The firm admitted that it had been retained by the company to exercise the option and that it had owed the company a duty of F

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A care in doing so. But it denied both liability and quantum. The action came on for trial in October 1992 and was estimated to last 10 to 12 days. In December 1992, after the trial had already lasted for six weeks and evidence was still being given on behalf of the firm, the case was settled upon payment by the firm of £1,480,000 and £320,000 towards the company's costs. The sum of £1,480,000 represented the greater part of the damages claimed.

B Mr Johnson has always claimed that the firm's negligence in the manner in which it exercised the option also caused substantial financial loss to him personally. In April 1993 he brought his own proceedings against the firm. This can have come as no surprise. Mr Johnson had made no secret of his intention to bring such a claim. He had indicated as much in January 1991, well before the company's action came to trial, and his solicitors had been in correspondence with the firm's insurers during 1991-92. On the eve of the trial his solicitors told those representing the firm that his personal claim would be pursued whether the current proceedings resulted in judgment or settlement. During the settlement negotiations in December 1992 the parties' respective solicitors discussed the possibility of an overall settlement of both Mr Johnson's personal claim and the company's claim, but the paucity of information to enable his personal claim to be quantified made this impossible. It was left that it was a separate claim which would be a matter for separate negotiation in due course. In agreeing the terms on which the company's claim was settled, Mr Johnson submitted to having most of his personal claim capped at £250,000 excluding interest and costs, and the company agreed to apply the settlement moneys in the discharge of liabilities of the company in respect of which Mr Johnson had given personal guarantees. This was designed to avoid the possibility of double recovery in respect of these liabilities if Mr Johnson brought his own proceedings and was successful.

E For the next 4½ years the proceedings brought by Mr Johnson followed the normal course. The parties served and amended their pleadings and exchanged witness statements. Mr Johnson served expert evidence. The firm made a payment into court. A trial date was obtained. But then came a sudden change of tack. The firm instructed fresh leading counsel. In December 1997 the firm's solicitors indicated, for the first time, that it intended to apply *inter alia* for an order to strike the action out as an abuse of the process of the court. In February 1998 the court ordered the trial of two preliminary issues: (i) whether the proceedings should be struck out as an abuse of the process of the court; and (ii) to what extent (if at all) and assuming the truth of the facts pleaded the heads of damages pleaded in paragraphs 23 and 24 of the re-amended statement of claim were irrecoverable by Mr Johnson as a matter of law by way of damages for the pleaded breaches of duty owed to him.

C Mr Johnson pleaded his claim in both contract and tort, and alleged that he had retained the firm to act for him personally as well as for the company in connection with the exercise of the company's option. He alleged that the firm had acted negligently in the manner in which it caused the option to be exercised, and that it had from time to time negligently and with unwarranted optimism advised him personally as to the likely duration and outcome of the Chancery proceedings.

H On the first question, the judge (Pumfrey J) found that the proceedings might well have been an abuse of the process of the court, but that in the

light of the circumstances in which the company's action had been settled the firm was estopped by convention from contending that they were. Both parties had acted on the common assumption that Mr Johnson would bring his own proceedings and that these would be entertained by the court. On the second question he ruled that none of the heads of damage pleaded was irrecoverable in law. A

The Court of Appeal (Nourse, Ward and Mantell LJJ) allowed the firm's appeal. It held that there was no excuse for Mr Johnson's failure to launch his own claims when the company brought its action. "If he could have done so", Mantell LJ said, "he should have done so". It held that there was no estoppel by convention; the parties shared a common assumption that Mr Johnson would bring his own proceedings, but they made no assumption one way or the other whether the court would entertain them; they never thought about the matter. On the second question the court differed from the judge on the authorities, which it agreed were in an unsatisfactory state, but held that, with only one exception, the pleaded heads of damage were arguably recoverable. Both parties now appeal to the House. Mr Johnson appeals on the first question; the firm cross-appeals on the second. B C

*Mr Johnson's appeal: abuse of process*

In describing the proceedings brought by Mr Johnson as an abuse of the process of the court, the Court of Appeal was seeking to apply the well known principle which Sir James Wigram V-C formulated in *Henderson v Henderson* (1843) 3 Hare 100, 114-115: D

"... I believe I state the rule of the court correctly, when I say, that where a given matter becomes the subject of litigation in, and of adjudication by, a court of competent jurisdiction, the court requires the parties to that litigation to bring forward their whole case, and will not (except under special circumstances) permit the same parties to open the same subject of litigation in respect of matter which might have been brought forward as part of the subject in contest, but which was not brought forward, only because they have, from negligence, inadvertence, or even accident, omitted part of their case. *The plea of res judicata applies*, except in special cases, not only to points upon which the court was actually required by the parties to form an opinion and pronounce a judgment, but to every point which properly belonged to the subject of litigation, and which the parties, exercising reasonable diligence, might have brought forward at the time." (My emphasis.) E F

As the passages which I have emphasised indicate, Sir James Wigram V-C did not consider that he was laying down a new principle, but rather that he was explaining the true extent of the existing plea of res judicata. Thus he was careful to limit what he was saying to cases which had proceeded to judgment, and not, as in the present case, to an out-of-court settlement. Later decisions have doubted the correctness of treating the principle as an application of the doctrine of res judicata, while describing it as an extension of the doctrine or analogous to it. In *Barrow v Bankside Members Agency Ltd* [1996] 1 WLR 257, Sir Thomas Bingham MR explained that it is not based on the doctrine in a narrow sense, nor on the strict doctrines of issue or cause of action estoppel. As May LJ observed in *Manson v Vooght* [1999] BPIR 376, 387, it is not concerned with cases where a court has decided the G H

A matter, but rather cases where the court has not decided the matter. But these various defences are all designed to serve the same purpose: to bring finality to litigation and avoid the oppression of subjecting a defendant unnecessarily to successive actions. While the exact relationship between the principle expounded by Sir James Wigram V-C and the defences of res  
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judicata and cause of action and issue estoppel may be obscure, I am inclined to regard it as primarily an ancillary and salutary principle necessary to protect the integrity of those defences and prevent them from being deliberately or inadvertently circumvented.

In one respect, however, the principle goes further than the strict doctrine of res judicata or the formulation adopted by Sir James Wigram V-C, for I agree that it is capable of applying even where the first action concluded in a settlement. Here it is necessary to protect the integrity of the settlement  
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and to prevent the defendant from being misled into believing that he was achieving a complete settlement of the matter in dispute when an unsuspected part remained outstanding.

However this may be, the difference to which I have drawn attention is of critical importance. It is one thing to refuse to allow a party to re-litigate a question which has already been decided; it is quite another to deny him the  
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opportunity of litigating for the first time a question which has not previously been adjudicated upon. This latter (though not the former) is *prima facie* a denial of the citizen's right of access to the court conferred by the common law and guaranteed by article 6 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1953). While, therefore, the doctrine of res judicata in all its branches may properly be  
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regarded as a rule of substantive law, applicable in all save exceptional circumstances, the doctrine now under consideration can be no more than a procedural rule based on the need to protect the process of the court from abuse and the defendant from oppression. In *Brisbane City Council v Attorney General for Queensland* [1979] AC 411, 425 Lord Wilberforce, giving the advice of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, explained that the true basis of the rule in *Henderson v Henderson* 3 Hare 100 is abuse  
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of process and observed that it "ought only to be applied when the facts are such as to amount to an abuse: otherwise there is a danger of a party being shut out from bringing forward a genuine subject of litigation". There is, therefore, only one question to be considered in the present case: whether it was oppressive or otherwise an abuse of the process of the court for Mr Johnson to bring his own proceedings against the firm when he could  
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have brought them as part of or at the same time as the company's action. This question must be determined as at the time when Mr Johnson brought the present proceedings and in the light of everything that had then happened. There is, of course, no doubt that Mr Johnson *could* have brought his action as part of or at the same time as the company's action. But it does not at all follow that he *should* have done so or that his failure to do so renders the present action oppressive to the firm or an abuse of the  
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process of the court. As May LJ observed in *Manson v Vooght* [1999] BPIR 376, 387, it may in a particular case be sensible to advance claims separately. In so far as the so-called rule in *Henderson v Henderson* suggests that there is a presumption against the bringing of successive actions, I consider that it is a distortion of the true position. The burden should

always rest upon the defendant to establish that it is oppressive or an abuse of process for him to be subjected to the second action. A

The rule in *Henderson v Henderson* 3 Hare 100 cannot sensibly be extended to the case where the defendants are different. There is then no question of double vexation. It may be reasonable and sensible for a plaintiff to proceed against A first, if that is a relatively simple claim, in order to use the proceeds to finance a more complex claim against B. On the other hand, it would I think normally be regarded as oppressive or an abuse of process for a plaintiff to pursue his claims against a single defendant separately in order to use the proceeds of the first action to finance the second, at least where the issues largely overlap so as to form, in Sir James Wigram V-C's words, at p 115, "the same subject of litigation". B

Particular care, however, needs to be taken where the plaintiff in the second action is not the same as the plaintiff in the first, but his privy. Such situations are many and various, and it would be unwise to lay down any general rule. The principle is, no doubt, capable in theory of applying to a privy; but it is likely in practice to be easier for him to rebut the charge that his proceedings are oppressive or constitute an abuse of process than it would be for the original plaintiff to do so. C

Mr Johnson conceded that he and the company are privies. He was in a position to decide when to pursue the two claims and whether to pursue them together or separately, and that is enough for present purposes. But Mr Johnson and the company are different legal persons, each with its own creditors, and that is a fact of critical significance. Mr Johnson's personal claims raised difficult issues not present in the company's action: (i) did he retain the firm to act for him personally? (ii) should the firm have foreseen that failure to exercise the option properly would cause loss to Mr Johnson personally as well as to the company? (iii) which if any of his personal losses were recoverable (the issues in the cross-appeal)? (iv) quantum. It was not in the company's interest for his personal claims to be joined with its own much simpler claim, or for its case to be delayed until Mr Johnson's own case was ready for trial. Had the company been in liquidation and its action brought by the liquidator, he would have been well advised to insist on separate trials and to object to any delay in the trial of the company's action. D

In these circumstances I am satisfied that Mr Johnson, who was bound to have regard to the interests of the company and its creditors, was entitled to defer the bringing of his own claims until after the company's claim had been resolved. Even if he had chosen to join the two claims in the same writ, it would have been both possible and appropriate for separate trials to be held of (i) liability (ii) quantum (company) (iii) Mr Johnson's title to sue and (iv) quantum (Mr Johnson); and for (iii) and (iv) to be held over until after (i) and (ii) had been determined. Even as things are, there is no real question of double vexation. The firm was always liable to be sued by two different plaintiffs each with its own cause of action and its own heads of loss. The only area of overlap is in relation to the standard of care which the firm observed. Given that Mr Johnson and the company are privies, neither of them could reopen an adverse judgment on this, being bound by issue estoppel; while the parties could make their own arrangements in the event of a settlement. E F G H

Accordingly, I would reject the firm's contention that it was an abuse of process for Mr Johnson to bring his action after the company's claim had

A been resolved. Even if this were not the case, however, I agree with the trial judge that it would be unconscionable for the firm to raise the issue after the way in which it handled the negotiations for the settlement of the company's action. I would not myself put it on the ground of estoppel by convention. Like the Court of Appeal, I have some difficulty in discerning a common assumption in regard to a matter about which neither party thought at all. This is not to say that estoppel has no part to play in this field. I would regard it as operating in the opposite way. Given that Mr Johnson was entitled to defer the bringing of his own proceedings until after the company's claims had been resolved, it would have been unconscionable for him to have stood by without disclosing his intentions and knowingly allowed the firm to settle the company's action in the belief that it was dealing finally with all liability arising from its alleged negligence in the exercise of the option. To bring his own claim in such circumstances would, in my opinion, amount to an abuse of the process of the court. But nothing like this took place.

This makes it unnecessary to deal with Mr Johnson's submission that it is too late for the firm to raise the issue. If necessary, however, I should have regarded the delay as fatal. Indeed, I should have regarded it as more than delay; I think it amounted to acquiescence. There is no proper analogy with the case which discloses no cause of action. Although it is obviously desirable to apply to strike out a claim which is doomed to fail at the earliest opportunity, there is no point in proceeding with a trial which serves no useful purpose. Even if the point is taken at the trial itself, it is a matter for the trial judge to decide whether to hear the evidence and adjudicate on the facts before deciding whether they give rise to liability, or to assume that the plaintiff will establish his allegations and decide whether, as a matter of law, they give rise to liability.

But the premise in the present case is that Mr Johnson has a good cause of action which he should have brought earlier if at all. I do not consider that a defendant should be permitted to raise such an objection as late as this. A defendant ought to know whether the proceedings against him are oppressive. It is not a question which calls for nice judgment. If he defends on the merits, this should be taken as acquiescence. It might well be otherwise if the ground on which the proceedings are alleged to be an abuse of process were different. But in a case of the present kind the court is not so much protecting its own process as the interests of the defendant.

Accordingly, I would allow Mr Johnson's appeal on the first question.

C *The firm's cross-appeal: recoverable heads of damage*

A company is a legal entity separate and distinct from its shareholders. It has its own assets and liabilities and its own creditors. The company's property belongs to the company and not to its shareholders. If the company has a cause of action, this is a legal chose in action which represents part of its assets. Accordingly, where a company suffers loss as a result of an actionable wrong done to it, the cause of action is vested in the company and the company alone can sue. No action lies at the suit of a shareholder suing as such, though exceptionally he may be permitted to bring a derivative action in right of the company and recover damages on its behalf: see *Prudential Assurance Co Ltd v Newman Industries Ltd (No 2)* [1982] Ch 204, 210. Correspondingly, of course, a company's shares are the

property of the shareholder and not of the company, and if he suffers loss as a result of an actionable wrong done to him, then prima facie he alone can sue and the company cannot. On the other hand, although a share is an identifiable piece of property which belongs to the shareholder and has an ascertainable value, it also represents a proportionate part of the company's net assets, and if these are depleted the diminution in its assets will be reflected in the diminution in the value of the shares. The correspondence may not be exact, especially in the case of a company whose shares are publicly traded, since their value depends on market sentiment. But in the case of a small private company like this company, the correspondence is exact.

This causes no difficulty where the company has a cause of action and the shareholder has none; or where the shareholder has a cause of action and the company has none, as in *Lee v Sheard* [1956] 1 QB 192, *George Fischer (Great Britain) Ltd v Multi Construction Ltd* [1995] 1 BCLC 260, and *Gerber Garment Technology Inc v Lectra Systems Ltd* [1997] RPC 443. Where the company suffers loss as a result of a wrong to the shareholder but has no cause of action in respect of its loss, the shareholder can sue and recover damages for his own loss, whether of a capital or income nature, measured by the diminution in the value of his shareholding. He must, of course, show that he has an independent cause of action of his own and that he has suffered personal loss caused by the defendant's actionable wrong. Since the company itself has no cause of action in respect of its loss, its assets are not depleted by the recovery of damages by the shareholder.

The position is, however, different where the company suffers loss caused by the breach of a duty owed both to the company and to the shareholder. In such a case the shareholder's loss, in so far as this is measured by the diminution in value of his shareholding or the loss of dividends, merely reflects the loss suffered by the company in respect of which the company has its own cause of action. If the shareholder is allowed to recover in respect of such loss, then either there will be double recovery at the expense of the defendant or the shareholder will recover at the expense of the company and its creditors and other shareholders. Neither course can be permitted. This is a matter of principle; there is no discretion involved. Justice to the defendant requires the exclusion of one claim or the other; protection of the interests of the company's creditors requires that it is the company which is allowed to recover to the exclusion of the shareholder. These principles have been established in a number of cases, though they have not always been faithfully observed. The position was explained in a well known passage in *Prudential Assurance Co Ltd v Newman Industries Ltd (No 2)* [1982] Ch 204, 222-223:

"But what [the shareholder] cannot do is to recover damages merely because the company in which he is interested has suffered damage. He cannot recover a sum equal to the diminution in the market value of his shares, or equal to the likely diminution in dividend, because such a 'loss' is merely a reflection of the loss suffered by the company. The shareholder does not suffer any personal loss. His only 'loss' is through the company, in the diminution of the value of the net assets of the company, in which he has (say) a 3% shareholding. The plaintiff's shares are merely a right of participation in the company on the terms of the articles of association.



A The shares themselves, his right of participation, are not directly affected by the wrongdoing. The plaintiff still holds all the shares as his own absolutely unencumbered property. The deceit practised upon the defendant does not affect the shares; it merely enables the defendant to rob the company. A simple illustration will prove the logic of this approach. Suppose that the sole asset of a company is a cash box containing £100,000. The company has an issued share capital of 100 shares, of which 99 are held by the plaintiff. The plaintiff holds the key of the cash box. The defendant by a fraudulent misrepresentation persuades the plaintiff to part with the key. The defendant then robs the company of all its money. The effect of the fraud and the subsequent robbery, assuming that the defendant successfully flees with his plunder, is (i) to denude the company of all its assets; and (ii) to reduce the sale value of the plaintiff's shares from a figure approaching £100,000 to nil. There are two wrongs, the deceit practised on the plaintiff and the robbery of the company. But the deceit on the plaintiff causes the plaintiff no loss which is separate and distinct from the loss to the company. The deceit was merely a step in the robbery. The plaintiff obviously cannot recover personally some £100,000 damages in addition to the £100,000 damages recoverable by the company."

D It is indeed obvious that (on the given facts, where no consequential losses are stated to have arisen) the defendant cannot be made liable for more than £100,000 in total. It is equally obvious, however, that if the damages were recoverable by the shareholder instead of by the company, this would achieve the same extraction of the company's capital to the prejudice of the creditors of the company as the defendant's misappropriation had done.

E It has sometimes been suggested (see, for example, *George Fischer (Great Britain) Ltd v Multi Construction Ltd* [1995] BCLC 260, 266G-1) that *Prudential Assurance Co Ltd v Newman Industries Ltd (No 2)* [1982] Ch 204 is authority only for the proposition that a shareholder cannot recover for the company's loss, and is confined to the case where the defendant is not in breach of any duty owed to the shareholder personally. That is not correct. The example of the safe-deposit box makes this clear. It is the whole point of the somewhat strained business of the key. The only reason for this is to demonstrate that the principle applies even where the loss is caused by a wrong actionable at the suit of the shareholder personally.

F *Prudential Assurance Co Ltd v Newman Industries Ltd (No 2)* was followed in *Stein v Blake* [1998] 1 All ER 724, where the facts bore some resemblance to the illustration in the earlier case. The defendant was a 50% shareholder and the sole director of a group of companies ("the old companies"). The plaintiff, who was the other 50% shareholder, alleged that, in breach of fiduciary duty, the defendant had misappropriated the assets of the old companies by purchasing them at an undervalue and transferring them to other companies in his sole ownership. The plaintiff, who could have brought a derivative action on behalf of the old companies, chose instead to bring a personal action, claiming that he had been deprived of the opportunity to sell his shares in the old companies at their proper value and had suffered personal loss. The Court of Appeal set aside an earlier grant of leave to appeal from the judge's order striking out the plaintiff's action.

The plaintiff sought to distinguish *Prudential Assurance Co Ltd v Newman Industries Ltd (No 2)* [1982] Ch 204 by arguing that the defendant was in breach of a duty owed to him personally. But, as I pointed out, that was not the problem. The problem was that the only conduct relied upon as constituting a breach of that duty was the misappropriation of assets belonging to the old companies, so that the only loss suffered by the plaintiff consisted of the diminution in the value of his shareholding which reflected the depletion of the assets of the old companies. The old companies had their own cause of action to recover their loss, and the plaintiff's own loss would be fully remedied by the restitution to the companies of the value of the misappropriated assets. It was not alleged that the plaintiff had been induced or compelled to dispose of his shares in the companies; he still had them. If he were allowed to recover for the diminution in their value, and the companies for the depletion of their assets, there would be double recovery. Moreover, if the action were allowed to proceed and the plaintiff were to recover for the lost value of his shares, the defendant's ability to meet any judgment which the old companies or their liquidators might obtain against him would be impaired to the prejudice of their creditors. The plaintiff would have obtained by a judgment of the court the very same extraction of value from the old companies at the expense of their creditors as the defendant was alleged to have obtained by fraud.

*Heron International Ltd v Lord Grade* [1983] BCLC 244 was a case on the other side of the line. In the course of a contested take-over bid, the directors of the target company who owned a majority of the company's voting shares were alleged, in breach of their duties both to the company and to its shareholders, to have accepted proposals which would reduce the value of the company's assets and hence of its shares and induce the shareholders to accept the lower of two rival offers. The Court of Appeal granted the shareholders injunctive relief. It observed that the decision of the directors, if implemented, would cause loss in two directions. First, the company would suffer loss to the extent that the value of its assets would be depreciated. That loss would be borne exclusively by the company. It was not a loss in respect of which the shareholders could recover, even if the market value of their shares fell in consequence. The other loss would be to the pockets of the shareholders because they were deprived of the opportunity of accepting the higher offer. That loss would be suffered exclusively by the shareholders. It was not a loss to the coffers of the company, which would remain totally unaffected. That could readily be demonstrated. If, as a result of the decision of the board which was impugned, the take-over went through and the entire shareholding in the company became vested in one bidder at a lower price than was available from the other, the recovery of damages by the company would not compensate the former shareholders for their loss. Only a direct action by those shareholders in their own right, and not in right of the company, could provide the necessary compensation.

In *R P Howard Ltd v Woodman Matthews & Co* [1983] BCLC 117 a company and its principal shareholder brought an action in negligence against a firm of solicitors, alleging that, as a result of the firm's failure to advise an application for a new tenancy under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954, the company had been obliged to accept a new lease on terms less favourable than those it would have obtained under the Act. In addition, the

- A principal shareholder was obliged to agree that he would not sell his controlling interest in the company without the landlord's consent. The judge (Staughton J) distinguished *Prudential Assurance Co Ltd v Newman Industries Ltd (No 2)* [1982] Ch 204 on the ground that the shareholder was not seeking to recover a sum which merely reflected the loss suffered by the company but his own independent loss because his shares were less easily saleable and therefore had a lesser market value. This is capable of being misunderstood, but was correct on the facts, since the shareholder's claim was rightly limited to the loss arising from the requirement to obtain the landlord's consent to any sale of the shares. This was additional to and did not reflect the loss suffered by the company as a result of the terms of the new lease. The shareholder made no claim on his own account in respect of the diminution in the value of his shares due to this.
- C In *Barings plc v Coopers & Lybrand* [1997] 1 BCLC 427 a parent company, brought an action in negligence against the auditors of a wholly-owned subsidiary. Leggatt LJ correctly distinguished both *Prudential Assurance Co Ltd v Newman Industries Ltd (No 2)* [1982] Ch 204, where the shareholder had no independent cause of action of his own, and *George Fischer (Great Britain) Ltd v Multi Construction Ltd* [1995] 1 BCLC 260, where the company had none. Here each of them had its own cause of action. But he stated, at p 435B-E, that if the shareholder suffered loss as a result of a breach of duty on the part of the defendant owed to it, it could not be disentitled from suing merely because the damages claimed would or might include damages for which the defendant was liable to the company. There was, he said, no legal principle which debarred a holding company from recovering damages for loss in the value of its subsidiaries resulting directly from the breach of a duty owed to the holding company as distinct from a duty owed to the subsidiaries. I do not accept this as correct.
- E In *Christensen v Scott* [1996] 1 NZLR 273 the company carried on the business of potato-farming on tenanted land. The landlord defaulted on a mortgage of the land and the mortgagee entered into possession and exercised its power of sale. Access to the standing crop was refused and the company was unable to harvest it, with disastrous financial consequences. The company went into liquidation and receivership, and the receiver and the liquidator brought proceedings for negligence against the company's professional advisers. The action was settled. The shareholders, who had guaranteed the company's debts, opposed the settlement, alleging that the sums offered by way of settlement were totally inadequate. In due course they brought their own proceedings, alleging that the defendants owed duties of care to them personally. They claimed damages representing the diminution in the value of their shareholdings arising from the defendants' negligence. The judge held that such damages reflected the company's loss and could not be recovered by the shareholders. The Court of Appeal of New Zealand allowed the shareholders' appeal.
- G In giving the judgment of the court, Thomas J distinguished *Prudential Assurance Co Ltd v Newman Industries Ltd (No 2)* [1982] Ch 104 on the ground that it did not necessarily exclude a claim brought by a shareholder to whom a separate duty was owed and who suffered his own personal loss as a result of that breach of duty. So far, of course, this is correct: *Heron International Ltd v Lord Grade* [1983] BCLC 244 and *R P Howard Ltd v Woodman Matthews & Co* [1983] BCLC 117 are just such cases. The judge

observed that the fact that the loss was also suffered by the company did not mean that it was not also a personal loss suffered by the shareholder. "Indeed," he added, at p 280:

"the diminution in the value of Mr and Mrs Christensen's shares in the company is by definition a personal loss and not a corporate loss. The loss suffered by the company is the loss of the lease and the profit which would have been obtained from harvesting the potato crop. That loss is reflected in the diminution in the value of Mr and Mrs Christensen's shares. They can no longer realise their shares at the value they enjoyed prior to the alleged default of their accountants and solicitors."

I cannot accept this reasoning as representing the position in English law. It is of course correct that the diminution in the value of the plaintiffs' shares was by definition a personal loss and not the company's loss, but that is not the point. The point is that it merely reflected the diminution of the company's assets. The test is not whether the company could have made a claim in respect of the loss in question; the question is whether, treating the company and the shareholder as one for this purpose, the shareholder's loss is franked by that of the company. If so, such reflected loss is recoverable by the company and not by the shareholders.

Thomas J acknowledged that double recovery could not be permitted, but thought that the problem did not arise where the company had settled its claim. He considered that it would be sufficient to make an allowance for the amount paid to the liquidator. With respect, I cannot accept this either. As Hobhouse LJ observed in *Gerber Garment Technology Inc v Lectra Systems Ltd* [1997] RPC 443, 471, if the company chooses not to exercise its remedy, the loss to the shareholder is caused by the company's decision not to pursue its remedy and not by the defendant's wrongdoing. By a parity of reasoning, the same applies if the company settles for less than it might have done. Shareholders (and creditors) who are aggrieved by the liquidator's proposals are not without a remedy; they can have recourse to the Companies Court, or sue the liquidator for negligence.

But there is more to it than causation. The disallowance of the shareholder's claim in respect of reflective loss is driven by policy considerations. In my opinion, these preclude the shareholder from going behind the settlement of the company's claim. If he were allowed to do so then, if the company's action were brought by its directors, they would be placed in a position where their interest conflicted with their duty; while if it were brought by the liquidator, it would make it difficult for him to settle the action and would effectively take the conduct of the litigation out of his hands. The present case is a fortiori; Mr Johnson cannot be permitted to challenge in one capacity the adequacy of the terms he agreed in another.

Reflective loss extends beyond the diminution of the value of the shares; it extends to the loss of dividends (specifically mentioned in *Prudential Assurance Co Ltd v Newman Industries Ltd (No 2)* [1982] Ch 204) and all other payments which the shareholder might have obtained from the company if it had not been deprived of its funds. All transactions or putative transactions between the company and its shareholders must be disregarded. Payment to the one diminishes the assets of the other. In economic terms, the shareholder has two pockets, and cannot hold the defendant liable for his inability to transfer money from one pocket to the other. In principle, the

A company and the shareholder cannot together recover more than the shareholder would have recovered if he had carried on business in his own name instead of through the medium of a company. On the other hand, he is entitled (subject to the rules on remoteness of damage) to recover in respect of a loss which he has sustained by reason of his inability to have recourse to the company's funds and which the company would not have sustained itself.

B The same applies to other payments which the company would have made if it had had the necessary funds even if the plaintiff would have received them qua employee and not qua shareholder and even if he would have had a legal claim to be paid. His loss is still an indirect and reflective loss which is included in the company's claim. The plaintiff's primary claim lies against the company, and the existence of the liability does not increase C the total recoverable by the company, for this already includes the amount necessary to enable the company to meet it.

On the assumption which we are bound to make for the purpose of this appeal, which is that the firm was in breach of a duty of care owed to Mr Johnson personally, he is in principle entitled to recover damages in respect of all heads of non-reflective consequential loss which are not too D remote. Mr Johnson's principal complaint is that the firm negligently failed to exercise the company's option in a manner which would be incontestable. Even if this constituted a breach of a duty owed to Mr Johnson personally as well as to the company, there was a single breach which made it impossible for the company to establish that it had exercised the option without E money at normal commercial rates of interest on the security of the land and commence the proposed development. Damages in respect of these heads of damage are recoverable by the company, and in so far as they are reflected in the diminution in the value of Mr Johnson's shares in the company are not recoverable by him.

There is a subsidiary complaint, that the firm represented both to the company and to Mr Johnson personally that the Chancery proceedings were F certain of success and that judgment would be obtained within a relatively short time. These are separate representations which may be separately sued upon by each representee. In so far as Mr Johnson relied upon the representation made to him and suffered a separate and distinct loss qua representee and not merely qua shareholder or potential recipient of money from the company, he is entitled to recover.

G Lord Bingham has identified the various heads of financial loss alleged in the statement of claim. I agree with his analysis and do not wish to add anything except in relation to Mr Johnson's pension. Mr Johnson claims that, but for its lack of funds resulting from the firm's failure to exercise the option properly, the company would have continued to make contributions to Mr Johnson's pension scheme. For the reasons I have endeavoured to state, Mr Johnson cannot recover the amount of the contributions which the H company would have made if it had had the necessary funds; this merely reflects the company's loss and is included in its own claim. Nor can Mr Johnson claim interest in respect of the lost contributions for the same reason. But Mr Johnson's claim in respect of the enhancement of his pension is a different matter. The problem here is one of remoteness of damage, not

reflective loss, for the loss (or strictly the net loss) is one which the company could not have sustained itself. Had Mr Johnson carried on business in his own name instead of through the medium of the company, then (subject only to the question of remoteness) he would have been entitled to recover a sum representing the lost increase in the value of his pension after giving credit for the amount saved in respect of the contributions and interest. Such loss is separate and distinct from the loss suffered by the company, and while Mr Johnson's claim to recover it faces obvious difficulties it should not be struck out at this stage. But if he does establish his claim, he will have to give credit for the contributions which would have been required, whether by the company (reflective loss) or by himself (which he has saved), together with interest thereon.

For the reasons given by Lord Bingham, I too would strike out Mr Johnson's claims to damages for mental distress and anxiety and aggravated damages.

Accordingly, I would dismiss the cross-appeal while varying the order of the Court of Appeal in the manner proposed.

*Appeal allowed.*

*Cross-appeal dismissed save that paragraphs 8 (except last sentence), 10 and 13 of schedule of loss served pursuant to order of 16 October 1998 and paragraph 24 of re-amended statement of claim of 31 March 1994 be struck out.*

*Defendants to pay plaintiff's costs in House of Lords and below, to include costs of appeal and cross-appeal.*

*Solicitors: Shoosmiths, Fareham; Beachcroft Wansbroughs.*

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