
Introduction

Research programs, Marxism's included, can be characterized in terms of their methods and their results. They are not monolithic enterprises; nor do they always possess their own unique cluster of methodologies and putative successes. Often there is variation within programs and more or less continuous gradations between them. But for all that, there remains the fact that different research programs exhibit different central tendencies.

In Part I, we concentrated on one of Marxism's major theoretical results: historical materialism. While we argued that substantial portions of orthodox historical materialism cannot withstand scrutiny, its core does seem viable.

In Part II, we turn our attention to a number of methodological issues implicated in the project of reconstructing Marxism. By "methodology" we refer to views about how to develop social theory and conduct research: how to construct explanations, what it means to claim that some causes are more important than others, how to form and transform concepts, and how to gather and evaluate data in research. Typically, methodological doctrines are supported by philosophical arguments, but they can also be practical heuristics not grounded in any philosophical defense.

One of the hallmarks of the Marxian tradition in social theory has been the claim that Marxism embodies distinctive methodological doctrines that sharply distinguish it from "bourgeois" social theory. While the substance of such claims has varied considerably, there has been virtual unanimity among Marxists that Marxism and its rivals are separated by a deep, and philosophically irreconcilable, methodological fissure. At times, as in Lukács's famous pronouncements in his essay "What is Orthodox Marxism?", methodological doctrines are held to be

the only thing that differentiates Marxism from its rivals.¹ All of the substantive propositions of Marxism could be rejected, Lukács wrote, and yet Marxism would remain valid because of its distinctive method. While most defenders of the claim to methodological distinctiveness have not taken such an extreme position, there has been a virtual consensus within the Marxist tradition that Marxist and bourgeois methodologies are radically opposed.

As we remarked in Chapter 1, this consensus no longer exists. Analytical Marxists reject claims for Marxism's methodological distinctiveness, insisting that what is valuable in Marxism is its substantive claims about the world, not its methodology.

In Chapter 6 we explore a longstanding problem in the philosophy of social science: the opposition between methodological holism and methodological individualism. Marxists have often prided themselves on their holistic treatment of social life. One of the great flaws in "bourgeois" social science, it has often been claimed, is its individualism, its tendency to treat individuals as disconnected atoms, shorn of their crucial relational properties. The historical alignment of Marxism with holism has not prevented some instances of "crossing over"—of non-Marxists who espouse holistic approaches and of Marxists who see some virtue in methodological individualism. Still, a strong historical case could be made for the claim that Marxism has possessed a distinctive central tendency that eschews individualism and embraces holism. The historical record also shows that some have seen this inclination as a virtue of Marxist theorizing, while others have viewed it as a debilitating vice. In Chapter 6, we try to clarify precisely what is at issue in the holism/individualism debate. We propose a way of acknowledging the importance of micro-foundational accounts that does not require the reduction of macro-level phenomena to their micro-foundational bases.

Chapter 7 examines two related issues, which have figured prominently in debates between Marxists and theorists working in "post-Marxist" radical theory: what it means to consider one cause more important than another, and in what senses causes can be thought to enter explanations in qualitatively asymmetrical ways. Base and superstructure are said to be asymmetrically related to each other in historical materialism. This conceptual ingredient within Marxist theorizing is also deployed when Marxists compare their own proposals with models constructed within other research traditions. For example, Marxists and feminists often disagree about the different contributions that class and gender make in structuring the oppression of women. Marxists and neo-

Weberians disagree about the roles played by class conflict, on the one hand, and autonomous tendencies in state bureaucracies, on the other, in shaping state policies. Both in describing what is true within Marxist theories and in describing relations that obtain between Marxist and other theories, the concept of causal priority looms large. Clarifying the meanings that have been assigned to this idea is the principal task of Chapter 7.

The theses we develop in these chapters are more often deflationary than constructive. Our approach to the issues of holism and individualism involves identifying several senses that may be given to reductionist and anti-reductionist pronouncements. Some versions of both positions are palpably implausible. With respect to the ones that remain, we argue that there should be considerable agreement among social scientists, and that when there is not, the problems are to be resolved empirically, not by formulating a priori methodological maxims. Thus we think that much, though not quite all, of the venerable debate between methodological individualists and methodological holists is much ado about nothing. Likewise, in the case of causal asymmetries, we clarify a number of distinct meanings that may attach to the claim that one cause is "more important" than another. We then show that many apparently substantive disputes in the social sciences rest on misunderstandings of what such claims assert. Once clarified, many of these disputes turn out to lose their substance.

In general, then, our message is that it is important to clarify methodological issues in order to clear the decks for substantive analysis. Too often, radical theorists imply that their opponents are adequately discredited simply by showing that their arguments violate some foundational methodological precept: they are reductionist, or economistic, or undialectical, or individualistic. Our hope is that in clarifying the issues around a number of these methodological problems we will show that, in general, there is much less to these positions than meets the eye.

1. See Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp. 1–26.