

6. Contrast Przeworski and Sprague 'thus the fact of voting... cannot be treated as a result of a decision made by each individual separately and independently from the past each time' (1986, p. 147), with Przeworski once again on the hypothetical Mrs Jones, 'she has objectives and resources; she chooses to become a worker' (1985a, p. 99).
7. A point made in Michael Burawoy's chapter in this collection, 'Marxism without Micro-Foundations' (see also Kischelt 1993, p. 322).
8. If Labour had taken 64 per cent of working-class votes in 1979, it would have won over two million more votes. The increase in its middle-class base between 1964 and 1979, from the growing middle-class share of the electorate, brought it under one million more.
9. It is assumed that workers' savings are negligible and that state spending is unproductive (see Przeworski 1985a, p. 179).
10. In this example we assume that capitalists are able to solve the collective action problems they might face and we treat them as a unitary actor.
11. Figures quoted are in 1975 prices. OECD data indicate that a much more severe fall in manufacturing investment occurred between 1979 and 1981 under a Conservative government than between 1974 and 1975. Capital expenditure on manufacturing fell in 1980 prices, from £7495 million pounds in 1979 to £6479 million pounds in 1980 and £4865 million pounds in 1981 (see OECD 1987). Investment remained stable in distribution and services. Przeworski's model does not explain why capitalists were shifting investment from manufacturing to these other sectors.
12. Contrast, for example, the 29 per cent of the aged who lived in poverty in the UK during the late 1980s with the 1 per cent who did so in Sweden (see Anderson 1992, p. 326).

*Terrell (David & Paul) (1993) Rational Choice Marxism
(1993, The Pennsylvania State University Press)*

9 Marx and Methodological

Individualism

Mark E. Warren

In this chapter I pursue two projects, one critical and one reconstructive. The critical project concerns Jon Elster's influential and controversial argument that methodological individualism guides the acceptable aspects of Marx's thought.¹ Elster's claim is interesting not just because it breaks with the widely held notion that Marx's thinking does not involve methodological individualism in any sense,² but also because he uses it to focus on the 'microfoundations' of Marx's claims about social causalities.³ Marx provides an exemplary account of how to unravel the complex of relations between situated individual actions and their unintended outcomes, relations through which social and historical forces gain their quasi-independent logics. By taking this approach, Elster writes, Marx was able to transform the insight of his predecessors from Vico to Hegel 'that history is the result of human action, but not human design ... from a *Weltanschauung* into a scientific methodology' (Elster 1985, p. 27).

At the same time, Elster argues that Marx did not always follow through on his methodology, often failing to elaborate relations between individual actions and social outcomes. This in part accounts for the fact that so many Marxists use concepts that refer to 'collective actors' such as classes or states, as if these entities had aims and intentions with an autonomous explanatory power.⁴ Elster's own project is to provide an account of the implicit microfoundations of Marx's work through rational actor theory, and this is what motivates him to read Marx in light of methodological individualism.

In part because of the intrinsic importance of the problem, in part because of the increasing popularity of rational actor approaches within Marxism,⁵ it is worthwhile to look at how Elster conceptualises and defends methodological individualism in Marx, as well as to look at what Marx, and to a lesser extent Max Weber, had to say of relevance to the issue. I argue that although Elster is right to characterise Marx as methodological individualist in *some* sense, he is wrong about the sense for which he argues.⁶ His version of methodological individualism fails to

relate intentional properties of individuals (in this case, their propensity to rationally maximise) to emergent social properties such as rule-governed languages, cultures, and ideologies. It is also uncritical: because it treats intentional properties axiomatically, it can transform contingent patterns of intentionality into natural ones. For both reasons, Elster misses key and enduring aspects of Marx's method. In contrast both to those who deny methodological individualism altogether and to Elster's version, I argue for a methodological individualism that is critical and compatible with certain kinds of non-reductionist social explanations, while retaining Elster's concern with 'micro-foundations'. I shall also argue that this is the version exemplified in Marx's and Weber's writings.

Part of what is at stake here are different ideas about what counts as an explanation. I want to argue that the issue has been mistakenly conceived as if explanations in terms of social and individual concepts are mutually exclusive.⁷ This polarity has had an unfortunate effect when applied to Marx. Commentators who emphasise the irreducibly social aspects of Marx's concepts often reify them in structural concepts. They are then unable to relate their explanations to the historically situated, intentional practices of individuals.⁸ In contrast, Elster's attempt to reduce structural concepts to individual ones leaves us unable to explain the intentional properties of individuals, or so I shall argue. Part of the reason that the terms of the debate have been so unsatisfactory is that its participants have failed to relate the methodological issues to questions of social ontology, often implicitly relying on an ontology that abstractly polarises individual and social predicates. One result is that aspects of Marx's method that do not fit this ontology are missed, distorted, or ignored.

The stakes are not only explanatory, however. There are normative dimensions of methodological individualism that are rarely explicated in the literature.⁹ I suggest here that different individual-level concepts have different normative implications. I am interested in two different possibilities. Very often methodological individualism seems to involve a belief that an individualistic ontology allows one to salvage conceptually the possibility of free and rational human agency from deterministic views of society (James 1984, pp. 7, 178). Elster's goal is to save the possibility of strategic political action from various kinds of deterministic Marxisms. Whether or not one sympathises (and I do), I argue that his method does not do the job. The reason is that Elster's rational actor approach involves individual properties and capacities in a way that denies an explanatory role to the social relations that make them possible.

But there is a second and more successful way of relating individualistic methods and values to individual agency, implied in the critical dimensions

of Marx's method. When, for example, Marx criticises structural concepts (like the English political economists' concept of a market), his aim is to show how they depend on individual activities under specific circumstances, as well as on the ways individuals have been formed by these same structural outcomes and circumstances. In this way, he is trying to produce a kind of knowledge that would, at least in principle, make social outcomes and psychological effects intelligible to the individuals who produce them, thus contributing to their abilities to control their futures. Critical knowledge is a necessary (although not sufficient) condition for exerting human control over social development – necessary in turn for what Marx sometimes calls the 'many-sided development of individuality'. This normative aim underwrites the methodological requirement for relating social processes to individual actions.

Both the explanatory and normative issues depend on a closer specification of what 'individual' means in methodological individualism. I distinguish here between three fundamentally different senses of methodological individualism according to different meanings of the concept 'individual'. First, there is what I shall call a *methodological individualism of events* (MI_e), which is, in effect, a regulative ontology about the material reality of discrete (that is, 'individual') events in time and space. This is a broad sense of the notion, but it is not trivial: it asserts a materialism that rules out spiritual and essentialist notions of causality, and, by implication, holistic and collectivist concepts that purport to refer to something other than events in space and time. The methodological implication is that good explanations should not refer to things that have no existence in time and space. Most contemporary social thinkers hold this kind of position, including Marx. As I shall argue, the only point in calling this a kind of methodological individualism (rather than simply a metaphysical materialism) is that many, like Elster, draw methodological conclusions from this common sense materialism without distinguishing between ontological problems (what is real?), and epistemological/methodological ones (how do we know this reality?).

The second sense of methodological individualism is more narrow. Here the claim is epistemological, and so more genuinely methodological than the first sense. This claim is about what is *explanatory* of social things, namely, properties of individual humans. A classic formulation is J. W. N. Watkins', who writes that '[t]here may be unfinished or half-way explanations of large-scale social phenomena (say, inflation) in terms of other large-scale phenomena (say, full employment); but we will not have arrived at rock-bottom explanations of such large-scale phenomena until

The reason Elster gives for reduction to the properties of individuals is the desirability of referring explanations to sequential events, that is, M_t , which he elaborates in the epistemology of mechanistic realism:

The rationale for reductionism can briefly be stated as follows. If the goal of science is to *explain by means of laws*, there is a need to reduce the time-span between explanans and explanandum – between cause and effect – as much as possible, in order to avoid spurious explanations.... [T]hese risks are reduced when we approach the ideal of a continuous chain of cause and effect, that is when we reduce the time-lag between explanans and explanandum. This again is closely associated with going from the aggregate to the less aggregate level phenomena.... It is not only our confidence in the explanation, but our understanding of it that is enhanced when we go from macro to micro, from longer to shorter time-lags. To explain is to provide a *mechanism*, to open up the black box and show the nuts and bolts, the cogs and wheels, the desires and beliefs that generate the aggregate outcomes (Elster 1985, p. 5).

Among these 'nuts and bolts' are, in Elster's view, the rational intentions of agents, the reasons they do what they do. For Elster, these are, by analogy to natural science, the 'molecules' of social explanation; the ultimate reality to which explanations of intentions ought to refer.

What Elster has done here, however, is transform a regulative ontology into an epistemological doctrine. He has confused what is *real* with what *explains*; he has mistaken the material existence of individual properties for explanation by referring to individual properties.

An example will suggest why this distinction is important. Take the case of language, or for that matter, any symbolic system that is part of social reality. From an ontological standpoint, Elster is right that it is trivially true that language is simply made up of properties of individuals; surely language exists because it is in people's brains, in the sound waves that come out of their mouths, and so on. And it is also true that were we to get rid of all individual speakers of a language, we would also have got rid of the language. There would not be any residual reality, except, perhaps, its physically existent but unintelligible traces in writing.

All of this is true enough, but irrelevant to establishing M_t : a regulative materialism does not translate neatly into an epistemology. Try as one might, one cannot form a concept of a language that refers only to the empirical existence of individuals: the reason is simply that language is the kind of thing that emerges from social interaction. It gets those structural, rule-like qualities that make up the referents of the concept 'language' in and through social interaction. There is no cosmological mystery

to this. It simply means that the speech acts of individuals are intelligible only as part of a shared fabric of rules that govern speech, and cannot be further reduced without loss of intelligibility. As Wittgenstein argued, there can be no 'private language': to know a language is to learn the shared rules of the game. For this reason it is literally nonsensical to aggregate a concept like language, or ideology, or any other symbolic system for that matter, from the properties of individuals. I will return to this issue in the context of discussing Weber's methodological individualism. The point here is that if social phenomena are in part constituted by shared rules such as make up languages and cultures, then the fact that material properties of individuals and their situations are discrete and ontologically real does not determine our epistemological access to them. In such cases, reduction destroys the possibility of explanation. Because Elster confuses ontology and epistemology, he fails to understand that M_t does not follow from the regulative materialism of M_t .

If M_t does not follow from M_t , does this mean that M_t is trivial? No. Even when we distinguish its regulative materialism from epistemology, we find that M_t places more methodological constraints on explanations. For Marx, the materialism expressed by M_t played a crucial role in dismissing explanations that deduce empirical events from essential, metaphysical realities. For example, he viewed Hegel's concept of history as 'mystical' because it involved seeing human actions as effects of a logically unfolding ideal history.¹³ And many of Marx's criticisms of political economy were aimed at the less obviously mystical procedure of deducing explanations of practices from concepts such as 'private property' or 'value' embedded in a theoretical or ideological system.¹⁴ Marx and Engels are quite clear about this in a well-known passage in *The German Ideology*: 'The premisses from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premisses from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity.... The first premiss of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals....'¹⁵ Contemporary academic practice reified concepts as if they referred to something other than 'real individuals' interacting under specific circumstances. For Marx, the reality of abstractions is in their concrete determinations, that is, in the events they describe. This is why Marx is a methodological individualist in the materialistic sense of M_t .¹⁶

The point here is simply that one can subscribe to a regulative materialism in the manner of Kant without subscribing to the epistemological doctrine that only properties of individuals explain. Methodological

individualists take this step from a regulative materialist ontology to epistemology because they want to rule out causality by spiritual forces, essences, and other mysterious actors, and in this way increase empirical certainty. Marx did too. What Marx saw, and most methodological individualists miss, is that a materialist constraint on explanations does this all by itself, without added epistemological stipulations about what is explanatory.

ELSTER'S METHODOLOGICAL INDIVIDUALISM OF SUBJECTS

The version of methodological individualism to which Elster subscribes, what I am calling M_1 , conforms most closely to common usage. As I have suggested, it is important to notice that M_1 involves a doctrine of *what is explanatory* of social or individual phenomena, however these are defined as objects. M_1 is a doctrine of what explains, not what is to be explained. In contrast to M_2 (which, as I argue below, posits the possibility of agents as inferred from the meaningfulness of acts), M_1 explains acts as caused by intentions of agents.

Elster's use of M_1 is more careful than most: he does not argue that *everything* about the social outcomes of behavior can be explained in terms of individuals' intentions. He distinguishes between three different types of social explanation, although each is ultimately reducible to some combination of intentional and non-intentional properties of individuals. There is *intentional* explanation, which explains actions by referring to the goals individuals intend to achieve (Elster 1985, pp. 8–18). There is *sub-intentional* causality, which refers to non-intentional psychological properties of individuals that influence behavior (Elster 1985, pp. 18–22). And there is *supra-intentional* causality, which refers to phenomena such as markets which are the unintended outcomes of intentional actions. These social causalities are ultimately the aggregate effects of intentional action, even though they are not themselves intended (Elster 1985, pp. 22–7). It is here, in Elster's view, that Marx made his contribution, by showing how history is the result of human action, but not human design.

The problem, then, is not that Elster simply aggregates society only from intentional qualities of individuals. He is not guilty of psychologism (the view that social phenomena are reducible to psychological ones) or of an atomistic view of society, because he allows for other notions of causal explanation, as well as for the fact that the situations that affect individual actions are not reducible to intentions.¹⁷ Countless sub- and supra-intentional phenomena can and do cause behaviors,

actions, and social outcomes to diverge from intentions. On these issues, Elster has some original and interesting things to say.¹⁸ What is at issue here is that when Elster uses intentional explanations, he sees intentions as fully explainable by referring to properties of individuals.¹⁹ Intentions become, by analogy to physical particles like molecules, the rock-bottom referents of intentional explanations, except in this case the particles are instrumentally rational subjects. Elster is a proponent of M_1 (which explains intentions by referring to properties of individual subjects) because of his interpretation of intentionality in rational choice terms. As with all rational actor approaches, an *a priori* conception of agency serves an axiomatic role in the explanation of actions. Elster argues that to be conscious and coherent *as* an intentional actor means 'that given the beliefs of the agent, the action was the best way for him to realize his plans or desires. Hence rationality goes together with some form of maximizing behavior' (Elster 1985, p. 9). For Elster, then, *if* an action is to be explained in terms of intentions, then the explanation will refer to the instrumental rationality of agents. Showing how actions result from maximizing behavior is what counts as intentional explanation.

The problem is that Elster can reduce intentional explanations to the properties of individuals *only* by using an axiomatic conception of the agent or subject. He views the individual as a being that acts by relating internal desires to external circumstances through an instrumentally rational process of decision-making. What are historically given and changeable in Elster's model are needs, wants, and preferences. What is axiomatic is the way individuals cognitively relate to internal desires and external constraints. What Elster does, following neoclassical economics, is bifurcate the contents of consciousness into axiomatically-given capacities for decision-making on the one hand, and changeable internal and external contents on the other (see, for example, Elster 1985, pp. 9–10). It would be one thing to argue that this particular model of the subject captures the way individuals are in a particular society or culture – for example, one formed by market rationality.²⁰ In this case, the model's usefulness is simply an empirical question. But Elster does not historically situate his model in this way: he defines intentions as instrumentally rational, and then attributes this, *a priori*, to individual subjects. The attribution permits him to refer to these qualities of subjects as explanatory. This in turn allows explanation in terms of the properties of individuals, making Elster a proponent of M_1 .

It is true that in other work Elster has entertained the notion that the self may in fact be a multiplicity of agencies and not a unitary agent at all.²¹ Elster suggests that much seemingly irrational behaviour – that is,

behaviour not consistent with the axioms of rational actor modelling – might be explained as the outcome of competing sub-agencies within the psyche, strategies to maintain continuity of the self over time, and various cognitive devices for transforming immediate desires into long-term strategies. Much of Elster's thinking here is interesting and no doubt explanatory, resonating not only with cognitive psychology, but also with some interpretations of psychoanalysis.

With regard to questions of methodological individualism, however, even these more sophisticated conceptions of subjectivity are equivalent to axiomatic approaches. In both cases, intentional explanation remains a kind of M_1 , because what are explanatory of intentions are properties of individuals. The cost is that we are left unable to see how social phenomena – most importantly, culture and language – interact with and enable subjective capacities, including instrumental rationality itself.²² Thus in *Making Sense of Marx* Elster simply polarises the rational and the social as two, apparently unrelated, kinds of causation: 'Social causation is social causation; rational causation is rational causation' (Elster 1985, p. 476). 'Rational causation' is 'causation' in the special sense that actions are explained by reference to a rational faculty that exists by axiom. And the axiom operates as a metaphysic within the explanation: that is, the axiom is a non-empirical cause of empirical actions. But surely this is an impoverished kind of explanation. As Nietzsche asked, satirising metaphysics of the subject (fully in the spirit of Marx), 'is it not rather merely a repetition of the question? How does opium induce sleep?' 'By virtue of a faculty, namely the *virtus dormitiva*,' replies the doctor in Molière ²³ In rejecting metaphysics of collective actors, Elster transforms what is, in Kant's terms, a regulative ontological materialism into a dogmatic metaphysics of the subject. Clearly, the explanatory deficiencies of metaphysics are no less deficient for being individual rather than collective propositions.

MARX'S CRITIQUE

Elster's reconstruction of Marx in terms of M_1 is especially odd since Marx went out of his way to criticize similar, although less careful and sophisticated, stipulative individualisms, not only because they fail to explain individual properties, but also because of their ideological qualities. Central to these approaches, in Marx's view, is a confusion about the conceptual status of the category 'individual'. Liberal Enlightenment thinkers, for example, believed they could guarantee the ideal of the individual by asserting the ontological and actual existence of individuals as

explanatory foundations. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx writes that in Rousseau, Smith, and Ricardo, the 'individual appears detached from the natural bonds etc. which in earlier historical periods make him the accessory of a definite and limited human conglomerate. [The Natural Individual now] appears as an ideal, whose existence they project into the past. Not as a historical result but as history's point of departure. As the Natural Individual appropriate to their notion of human nature, not arising historically, but posited by nature.'²⁴ Marx's point is clear: to posit the individual, to treat capacities, interests, or other aspects of the individual as axiomatic, given, natural, or otherwise metaphysically existent is to misunderstand why individuals with specific kinds of properties are possible, and how they develop within social relations.

Only in the eighteenth century, in 'civil society', do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity. But the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social (from this standpoint general) relations. The human being is in the most literal sense a *zoon politikon*, not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate himself only in the midst of society. Production by an isolated individual outside society ... is as much of an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living *together* and talking to each other.²⁵

Stipulative individualisms not only fail to explain, but also function as ideological justifications. Liberal Enlightenment thinkers, for example, would abstract the individual's capacities, needs, desires, and so on from social relations. Then they would make these same attributes into axiomatic foundations of society and deduce necessary attributes of society from them, demonstrating the naturalness and inevitability of a particular kind of society in terms of its own effects.

It is in this way that M_1 can be closely related to ideological justification. Elster's approach does allow one to treat some of Marx's examples as problems of historically variable needs and preferences. But his reification of the instrumental rationality that, on Marx's account, became an attribute of social action only in 'civil society', does not escape this kind of objection.

It is this point that inspired the Marxist structuralism of Althusser and Poulantzas. Their views about the priority of social structures are based on the view that ideologies work in part by constituting specific kinds of self-understandings within specific power relations, in this way producing

specific kinds of individuals.²⁶ Reflexive understanding of the self depends on the attributions of others, on opportunities for actions afforded by power relations, and on concepts of the self embedded in culture. One's view of oneself as an agent with specific capacities for social action (as worker, wife, entrepreneur, citizen, and so on) is an effect of ideological interpretations of one's social position and experience. Because these attributes of subjectivity are, in these senses, social products, they cannot be given a theoretical priority over social relations, nor even conceived outside of them. Whenever theorists do this, their categories of agency become ideological; they veil determinations of subjectivity that are, at least to some extent, defined within power relations. *MI*_s transforms into non-problems the relationships between ideology and agency to which the structuralists call our attention.

The problem with the structuralists, however, is that they also believe that rejecting *MI*_s involves rejecting all methodological individualism. They are, as Susan James puts it, 'absolute holists' (James 1984, Chs IV and V). They understand that Marx refused to reify individual needs and capacities – this is clear enough. But they also believe that rejecting *MI*_s requires the opposite, namely, conceiving individuals as nothing but the effects of social structures. This, of course, confirms the worst fears of those who subscribe to *MI*_s. By reifying society, Althusser and Poulantzas fail to show how individual capacities are possible, and for this reason fail to engage the critical elements of Marx's social theory. They do not understand that there is an alternative to *MI*_s, what I am calling *MI*_o, and which I elaborate below. The confusion shows up, for example, in the fact that they consistently fail to distinguish, as objects of investigation, social structures and collective agents like classes, from practices in the context of social relations. The former were not Marx's problematics and therefore not his primary objects of study, but rather derivative conceptual structures. The latter were his problematics and objects of study. If Elster posits the capacities that define subjectivity, then, the structuralists see every concept of subjectivity as 'ideology'. They cannot make Marx's goal of a socially-enabled individuality intelligible because they hold that *all* references to subjectivity are ideological.

In contrast to both Elster and the structuralists, Marx's position involved seeing attributes of subjectivity – including capacities for rational action – as developed through social interaction. In criticizing Max Stirner's contrast of personal and general interests, for example, Marx writes that 'he should have realized that individuals have always started out from themselves, and could not do otherwise, and that therefore both the aspects he noted are aspects of the personal development of individuals; both are

equally engendered by the empirical conditions of life, both are only expressions of one and the same personal development of people and are therefore only in seeming contradiction to each other ²⁷

Marx's theoretical point is that one ought to use concepts that can account for the polarity of self and society, and not treat self and society as axiomatic concepts. To do so would be to treat the results of an historical process of differentiation of self and society as the causes of that process. In statements such as these, it is clear that what Marx is treating as 'real', as the objects of explanation, are human activities. Marx's method follows from the way he conceives these activities – that is, the way he conceptually constitutes 'activities' or 'practices' of individuals as objects of explanation. It will make sense, then, to characterise Marx as a 'methodological individualist' only if one uses the term to capture this aspect of his approach.

METHODOLOGICAL INDIVIDUALISM OF ACTIONS: WEBER

Doing so, however, requires some consideration of what kind of objects human activities are, an ontological question that is always (logically) prior to questions of what explains them. One does not find this kind of investigation in Elster, except as an axiom about rationality which he compares to the regulative metaphysics of mechanism in natural science.²⁸ Nonetheless, such questions are not outside of what has traditionally been referred to as methodological individualism, specifically, that of Max Weber. One finds in Weber considerations about social ontology that produce what I have been calling a *methodological individualism of actions* (*MI*_a). A look at Weber's method will allow a characterization of similar features of Marx's.

The notion that Weber's methodological individualism captures the essential features of Marx's method runs counter to the standard view. Most commentators see Marx and Weber as having opposed methodologies. Marx a 'structural' or 'collectivist' and Weber an 'individualist' one.²⁹ This view, however, rests on a misunderstanding of the distinctive nature of Weber's methodological individualism, as well as a failure to specify the logical relation between social structures and actions in Marx.

A methodological individualism of actions is intrinsic to Weber's social ontology and the conception of social science that follows from it. His well-known beginning of *Economy and Society* defines sociology as 'a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences. We shall

speak of "action" insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior – be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is "social" insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course.³⁰

Weber is defining here a social ontology of action as a regulative principle of explanation. In doing so he also is defining a certain domain of events as objects of explanation for social science. In this way, MI_a involves a further specification of MI_s . What is 'individualistic' in Weber's method is that he views significant *objects of explanation* as the *acts* (individual or typical) of persons. Actions, rather than persons or social structures, are the ultimate referents of concepts of social science; this what they are about.³¹

By focusing on actions rather than individual dispositions or social structures, Weber implicitly deconstructs the polarity of individual and society from an explanatory perspective, while retaining its normative (as well as existential) significance. For Weber what makes an event in space and time an *action* is its reflexive element, the understandings and goals that individuals attach to their behaviours. He presumes that humans' abilities to evaluate external situations and internal motivations endow them with capacities for agency (Roth and Schluchter 1979, p. 73). This is why explanations must show how agents relate these capacities to their situations – that is, explanations must be sufficient to explain acts of individuals, precisely because these are the events of significance for social science.

Things that are not actions – like natural events, biological stimuli, cultural rules and norms, and even social structures – are not intrinsically interesting for social science; they are not, in the final analysis, what social explanations are about. But this does not mean that such non-individual phenomena are not explanatory, since they are always conditions of action. They mold the intentions, affects, and material possibilities that are combined in actions. Precisely because they are conditions, they can be explanatory of the intentional properties of actions without being properties of individuals. What distinguishes Weber's MI_a from MI_s is that intentional properties of individuals, including their rational capacities, are problematic rather than axiomatic, and thus are not stipulative of explanations.

This logic of explanation emerges from a careful reading of Weber's most definitive statement of methodological individualism:

Action in the sense of subjectively understandable orientation of behavior exists only as the behavior of one or more *individual* human beings.

For other cognitive purposes it may be useful or necessary to consider the individual, for instance, as a collection of cells, as a complex of biochemical reactions, or to conceive his psychic life as made up of a variety of different elements, however these may be defined. Undoubtedly such procedures yield valuable knowledge of causal relationships. But the behavior of these elements, as expressed in uniformities, is not subjectively understandable. ... On the contrary, both for sociology in the present sense, and for history, the object of cognition is the subjective meaning-complex of action. ... For still other cognitive purposes – for instance, juristic ones – or for practical ends, it may be convenient or even indispensable to treat social collectivities, such as state, associations, business corporations, foundations, as if they were individual persons. Thus they may be treated as the subjects of rights and duties or as the performers of legally significant actions. But for the subjective interpretation of action in sociological work these collectivities must be treated as *solely* the resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons, since these alone can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action.³²

This statement, especially the last sentence, is often misunderstood to mean that social structures must be *explained* solely by the beliefs, intentions, and other properties of individuals.³³ If so, this would be an instance of MI_s . But the statement can be read more literally and consistently with Weber's sociology. Social structures must be accounted for in terms of the actions of individuals, but what explains these actions are not simply properties of individual subjects. The individualistic side-constraint applies to showing, for reasons of normative significance, how social structures are reproduced by individual actions. There is no methodological stipulation that sole causes of social structures will be subjective properties, but only that social science involves showing how social laws, structures, and functions are reproduced by the actions of individual persons, since these are the significant objects of cognition.

Put slightly differently, Weber sees an explanation as an account of the conditions of action. Actions are not uniquely explained by subjective properties, simply because not all conditions of action are subjective.³⁴ Some are intersubjective, such as culture and language, which have their own structural coherence. Others are non-subjective, such as biological capacity, material situation, and material relations of power, violence, and control. This is why Weber emphasises that explanations of actions must be sufficient both at the subjective level of 'meaning', and at the non-subjective level of 'causality'.³⁵

Weber's approach has many of the advantages that Elster and others want from methodological individualism: it is materialistic and concrete, since it ultimately is about actions specified by situational relations. Moreover, it avoids the reification that Elster associates with (crude) functional and structural explanations. While Weber believes that social scientists 'cannot afford to ignore collective concepts', they ought to be used heuristically, and above all they should not be treated as if their referents were (metaphysically) real collective actors: 'for sociological purposes there is no such thing as a collective personality which "acts"'.³⁶ Weber's 'individualism', like Marx's, is directed against reifications of society in the form of social and historical 'laws', Durkheimian functionalism, and legal-institutional explanations divorced from the practices of individuals.

But Weber's approach is different from Elster's on the crucial issue of reductionism in intentional explanations, or explanation at the level of 'meaning'. For Elster, to explain in terms of intentions means to show how instrumental rationality comes to operate on situationally dependent needs, wants and preferences. For Weber, intentions and meanings 'originate' in the subject only in the sense that they presuppose some general needs (such as the need for a meaningful orientation toward one's existence) and some general capacities of subjectivity (that is, the ability to monitor reflexively one's behavior). Intentional explanations that refer only to the properties of the individual *qua* subject are not sufficient. What explains intentions and meanings are, in part, intersubjective (and hence irreducibly social) meaning systems with their own structural coherence. These mold individual intentions and goals, develop or limit capacities, and focus responses to internal affects and external situations. In discussing the historical impact of rationalized religion, for example, Weber writes that '[n]ot ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the "world images" that have been created by ideas have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest. "From what" and "for what" one wished to be redeemed and, let us not forget, "could be" redeemed, depended upon one's image of the world.'³⁷ Although meaning-systems, like the rational religions Weber is discussing here, are reproduced by individuals acting under specific circumstances, they exhibit structural, or rule-like qualities.³⁸ These are emergent properties of society in much the same way as are languages. Explaining these properties in structural terms is an *epistemological* necessity that is already prefigured in Weber's ontology of social action. There are no 'individualistic' ways of understanding these individual objects of explanation. For Weber, to reduce rule-like phenomena to the properties of individuals

would be to dissolve the phenomena, or to mistake the systematic meaning of properties of individual actions for things that emanate only from individual subjects.

This is not a problem of methodological individualism holding only in 'extensional' contexts, and not in 'intensional' ones, as Elster might argue.³⁹ That is, the issue does not involve a failure to distinguish the factual existence of social phenomena from beliefs about social phenomena that in fact influence actions. Rather, for Weber, intersubjective meanings are only intelligible within languages, systems of ideas, cultures, and religions. These phenomena are not simply aggregates of individual 'beliefs', but rather intersubjective properties sustained only by the (social) interactions of individuals.

To put the point slightly differently, one might argue that these social qualities are nothing other than the beliefs of individuals. As I have suggested, this is not very helpful, since it is true only as an appeal to the regulative materialism of M_{re} . It says nothing about our epistemological access to these beliefs. On Weber's account, one can understand (*Verstehen*) how beliefs affect actions only by forming structural concepts ('ideal types') that capture emergent rule-like properties of intersubjective relations.⁴⁰ If Elster's distinction between intensional and extensional contexts holds, it does so only for M_{re} . It breaks down when M_{re} is further specified as M_{ir} . It is for this reason, of course, that Weber goes to some length to defend the non-reductionist method of *Verstehen* in social science, that is, understanding the structural coherence of the cultural systems of rules that in part determines subjective intentions and thereby the meaning of actions.

As exemplified by Weber, M_{ir} is consistent with certain kinds of Marxian structural concepts in a way that M_{re} is not. In Weber's terms, a social structure is an intersubjective set of rules, often sanctioned in some way, that individuals transform into meanings, and act on according to material circumstances in ways that reproduce structured patterns of conduct — patterns which are very often unintended. For example, in Weber's terms, a Marxist concept like 'capitalist relations of production' would be a second-order concept that explains by combining individual and situational referents. The situational referent would be to material control over property, or exclusions that some individuals enforce with respect to others. The structural referent would be legal and ideological legitimations with rule-like qualities. These rules mold the ways in which individuals conceptualize and act on their material situation as it relates to property exclusions. On this basis, one can develop more complex structural concepts, like classes, markets, a base-superstructure model, and so

on, concepts that name emergent social causalities without reifying them from the activities of individuals.⁴¹

This approach is consistent with situations Elster is especially concerned to explain, those where systematic outcomes are unintended by actors, as in the case of markets. Weber's approach goes beyond Elster's, however, by stipulating that the intentions actors have be explained and related to the systematic outcomes their actions produce. For example, markets may be unintended, but this *particular* unintended outcome is still contingent on cultural rules of maximising behavior that are part of a rationalised consumer culture, and molded by capitalist relations of production. This example suggests that although M_{gr} is non-reductionistic, it is not trivial: it rules out social concepts that are interpreted in quasi-naturalistic, teleological, or deterministic terms, such as one finds in Second International Marxism, French structuralism, and positivistic social science.

MARX'S METHODOLOGICAL INDIVIDUALISM

Using Weber as a paradigm of M_{gr} , can it be said that Marx is a methodological individualist in this sense, even though he rejects M_{gr} ? Certainly one does not find the explicit articulation of M_{gr} , that one finds in Weber. Moreover, Marx sometimes makes statements that are clearly outside of methodological individualism however one interprets it. In a well-known passage from *Capital* on conceptualizing the relation between capitalists and capitalism, Marx writes that 'here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests. My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however he may subjectively raise himself above them.'⁴²

Marx is arguing here that the defects of capitalism cannot be reduced to the subjective motives of individuals. It is often read, however, as an assertion that the 'natural laws of movement' of capitalist society determine the individual's practices. Marx's wording here is poor indeed, considering his own extensive polemics against abstract deductions of real events from 'categories', 'laws of political economy', and the like.

The statement seems less serious, however, if we see it simply as a statement critical of psychologism, which aggregates the characteristics of society from the motivations of individuals. Moreover, many other of

Marx's texts are quite consistent with M_{gr} . We read in the *Grundrisse*, for example, that 'the social character of production is a precondition, and participation in the world of production and in consumption is not brought about by the exchange of labor or the products of labor which are independent of it. It is brought about by the social conditions of production, within which the individual acts.'⁴³ The social world is neither independent of subjects (as in the case of absolute holism) nor does it reduce to or reflect the properties of subjects (as in the case of M_{gr}). Both are second-order conceptual abstractions from the practices of individual persons.

The same care is reflected in a passage from *The German Ideology*, where Marx and Engels write that the 'social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they really are, i.e., as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions, and conditions independent of their will'.⁴⁴ Marx is not asserting here that individual subjects are determined 'externally' by their circumstances, or that subjects determine circumstances. Rather, both individual and social properties are outcomes of practices insofar as humans appropriate and transform their circumstances. The perspective is one of actions and conditions of actions that both enable and constrain. This is precisely the perspective that defines M_{gr} .

Marx's commentators often fail to notice that M_{gr} is embedded in his elaboration of the object of explanation, 'human activity', and the ontology it presupposes. In this sense, the concept 'activity' (or concepts that Marx uses to denote actions – 'labor', 'practice', 'production', and so on) serves as the primitive concept from which all others follow, and which is a precondition for any explanation whatsoever. Marx's clearest statement to this effect is in *The German Ideology*, where he suggests that the German idealists have not thought through what is conceptually implied in historical activity, and which should therefore enter into explanations.⁴⁵ He identifies at least five such implications: the 'first premise of all human existence' is activity oriented toward the material requirements of life – that is, productive activity aimed at external nature according to immediate needs. The second is the 'production of new needs' – that is, a reflexive relation to internal nature.⁴⁶ The third set of relations are the rudimentary social relations of the family, relations which must exist to propagate the species. A fourth set are social relations: 'by social we understand the co-operation of several individuals,

no matter under what conditions, in what manner, and to what end'. Finally, these relations are conditions for language and self-consciousness, which develop through these historically situated relations to become intrinsic properties of practices.⁴⁷

There are two aspects of Marx's approach that deserve comment here. The first is that Marx, in manner comparable to Weber, has elaborated conceptually his *object of explanation*. The 'premises' of activity are part of the *concept* of activity that Marx is proposing; he is arguing that the notion of activity implies these conditions, and would literally be inconceivable without them.⁴⁸ This is what the German Idealists fail to see. These conditions of activity provide criteria for what a sufficient explanation would look like because they suggest what kinds of relations constitute the object, 'activity'.

Second, Marx proposes a conceptual order of derivation: the most rudimentary relations to internal needs, external nature, and other persons precede language and self-consciousness. Marx is arguing that our concepts of external things, our distinctions between self and world, our view of what our needs are and what satisfies them are closely related to the ways we interact with the world; they are sediments of practices. These interactions presuppose needs, language, social relations, nature, and intentionality as conditions of their possibility. But since the characteristics of each of these conditions evolves through activity, none can be treated as an explanatory foundation: one must simply give an account of the process, guided by second-order heuristic concepts that refer to specific historical outcomes.⁴⁹

In the case of Elster, the important implication is that concepts of the self, including selves that behave in an instrumentally rational manner, must be explained as products (not presuppositions) of individual activities situated in specific contexts.⁵⁰ A similar point holds, *mutatis mutandis*, with respect to Althusser's and Poulantzas' views that social structures are conceptually fundamental. In contrast, Gramsci's prison euphemism for Marx as the 'philosopher of praxis' makes exactly the right point: praxis, and not maximising behaviour or class structure, is the most encompassing concept in Marx's thinking. These other concepts are secondary elaborations of conceptually entailed relations.

It seems to me that the real difficulty with Marx is that he worked out his ontology of practice in the case of productive activities, but not aesthetic, moral, and linguistic ones.⁵¹ This is what left room within Marx for axiomatic conceptions of the subject, such as one finds in Elster, or misunderstandings about the explanatory status of structural concepts, such as one finds in Althusser and Poulantzas.

THE NORMATIVE DIMENSION

I have also suggested that the stakes of this kind of issue are never strictly explanatory – they are also normative. It is true, as Weber argues, that a normative preference for individualism is not immediately connected with methodological individualism.⁵² Yet this is not the whole picture, since what counts as a good explanation often depends on what one wants to do with it. If one is interested in getting a match to burn, one needs only a lawlike generalization about a succession of events that lead up to the match lighting. If one is trying to make a better match, one needs higher standards of completeness – some kind of account of the chemical mechanisms that lead from striking to lighting. Weber points to this sort of thing when he makes his argument for methodological individualism: he argues that sociology should explain actions rather than something else because of its 'cognitive purposes'.⁵³ Weber is somewhat mysterious about what this cognitive purpose is, but it seems likely from other writings that he thinks that humans have a general cognitive interest in what he calls 'teleologically rational action'.⁵⁴ This is why he insisted that sociology explain actions rather than behavior, functions, or some other kind of thing. This also provides his standards of explanatory completeness, viz., his demands for adequacy at the levels of both causality and meaning. Both are necessary for someone to judge their actions according to standards of internal consistency and empirical effectiveness.

In this respect, the normative dimension of Marx's social science is comparable, but not identical. Marx is concerned about the social conditions of freely developing individuality.⁵⁵ A fundamental indictment of capitalism, for example, is that the worker 'is no longer the principal agent of the production process: he exists along side it'.⁵⁶ Explaining how this could occur, and showing how it might be different, is what makes the action a significant object of social science for Marx. After all, if he had been interested in justifying social order rather than individual development, he probably would have used a different model of social science. For example, in Marx's view, the problem with bourgeois laws of political economy was not their descriptive inadequacy, but that they did not relate markets to human agents, making them seem natural and inevitable. To take another case, Durkheim's organic holism justifies a corporatist order because it distinguishes but does not relate individual intentions and social functions. And Leninist and Stalinist views of history as a law-like process justified the dominion of the party over peasants. Marx's criticisms of abstract holisms – that is, those not

elaborated in terms of the practices of individuals – are closely related to his normative interest in the free development of human capacities. In *The German Ideology*, for example, Marx and Engels write that in 'the present epoch, the domination of material conditions over individuals and the suppression of individuality by chance, has assumed its sharpest and most universal form, thereby setting existing individuals a very definite task. It has set them the task of replacing the domination of circumstances and of chance over individuals by the domination of individuals over chance and circumstances.'⁵⁷

In passages such as these, MI_n is a key to the critical aspects of Marx's explanations. By showing how what appear to be natural, lawlike outcomes are in fact outcomes of individual practices under specific circumstances, Marx intended to enlighten a class of people about the conditions of free agency. By altering reflexive understandings of practices, Marx thought he could show how these practices might be changed to produce different social outcomes. In this way, the explanatory concreteness of MI_n is an intrinsic part of Marx's normative and critical projects.

CONCLUSION

The advantages of reconstructing Marx in terms of a methodological individualism of actions are real. They involve strictures on concreteness: explanations should ultimately refer to the practices of historically-situated individuals rather than to non-empirical collective actors, laws of history, spiritual causalities, or axiomatic subjects. The advantages are also critical and normative: a methodological individualist reading highlights the interest Marx had in showing how humans can develop as free, rational agents by showing how this interest relates to his critical method, that is, relating seemingly independent social determinations to the activities of individuals. Marx's normative goals could be served only by making society transparent to individuals in this way. However, these advantages attach to MI_e and MI_n , not to MI_s : the methodological individualism of subjects merely substitutes metaphysical individual actors for metaphysical social actors. The advantages that Elster would like to capture through MI_s are better represented by MI_n , which entails neither the reductions nor the metaphysics of MI_s . Moreover, MI_n provides a more consistent and plausible interpretation of Marx's method.

NOTES

1. See Elster (1985), p. 4: 'the principle of methodological individualism, not infrequently violated by Marx, [underlies] much of his most important work'. For criticisms of Elster's reading of Marx, see a symposium in *Inquiry* 29/1 (1986). Elster is not the first to have interpreted Marx in this way; his position is put forward in substance, although less convincingly, in Tucker (1980).
2. With a few exceptions (see below, n. 5) Marxists and non-Marxists tend to agree on this point. For an example of the former, see Miller (1978), and for an example of the latter, see Popper (1966), pp. 323–4, and Agassi (1960), pp. 249–50.
3. Cf. Levine, Sober and Wright (1987). For comments on this see below, n. 10.
4. Elster (1985), esp. pp. 27–37. Elster is especially concerned with 'unelaborated' functional explanations, those that explain the existence of some social phenomenon (such as a class or a capitalist state) in terms of the consequences of its existence for reproducing the social system of which it is a part. According to Elster, if one fails to show how both the functions and the phenomenon stem from individuals, then one must depend on concepts of collective actors (e.g. the 'state guarantees the conditions of reproduction of the capitalist class', or 'the capitalist class uses the state as a means of guaranteeing private property') which have no ontological existence as *actors*. The question of functional explanation in Marxism is explored in a special issue of *Theory and Society* 11/4 (1982).
5. See also e.g. Roemer (1986), and Przeworski (1985b). Cf. Tucker (1980).
6. The arguments of this chapter also apply, without revision, to Roemer (1986), pp. 191–201, and to Tucker (1980), Ch. 1.
7. I agree with Anthony Giddens's comment that "structural sociology" and methodological individualism are not alternatives such that to reject one is to accept the other The point is to discard some of the terms of the debate while elaborating others further than any of its contributors have done. What the "individual" is cannot be taken as obvious. The question here is not that of comparing predicates but of specifying what human agents are like' – and, I would add, how they are possible (Giddens 1984, p. 220). For similar comments in relation to Marx, see Avineri (1971), pp. 94–5, Gould (1978), pp. 33–8, and Cunningham (1973), pp. 236–9. This is especially clear in the writings of the French structuralists Althusser and Poulantzas.
8. The normative implications of methodological individualism are often denied. Max Weber writes, for example, that 'it is a tremendous misunderstanding to think that an "individualistic" method should involve what is in any conceivable sense an individualistic system of values' (Weber 1978, p. 18). Cf. Elster (1985), p. 8.
10. Watkins (1968), p. 271. This version of methodological individualism does not require the more restrictive *definitional* methodological individualism, a doctrine usually associated with the positivist requirement that valid social concepts be translatable into a language referring only to observable

symbolic systems can be in any sense intelligible as 'beliefs' that are reducible to properties of individuals. To argue that language cannot be reduced to its individual users does not mean that it can be conceived apart from them, but only that communication makes sense only as an intersubjective phenomenon, a system of rule-following that exists only when there are groups of individuals. A 'belief' certainly is 'in' the mind of the individual as a psychic property. But the point is trivial by itself: these psychic properties are completely unintelligible, and therefore useless for social scientists, apart from intersubjective systems of meanings in terms of which they have social significance. On the continuity between Weberian social science and Wittgensteinian ordinary language analysis, see Bernstein (1976).

41. Weber in fact held that Marx's concepts *ought* to be interpreted in terms of *M₁*; what he refers to here as 'ideal types' of actions: 'all specifically Marxian "laws" and developmental constructs – insofar as they are theoretically sound – are ideal types. The eminent, indeed unique, *heuristic* significance of these ideal types when they are used for the *assessment* of reality is known to everyone who has ever employed Marxian hypotheses and concepts. Similarly their perniciousness, as soon as they are thought of as empirically valid or as real (i.e. truly metaphysical) "effective forces", "tendencies", etc. is likewise known to those who have used them' (Weber 1949).

42. Marx (1977) *Capital*, p. 417.
43. Marx (1977) *Grundrisse*, p. 361.
44. Marx (1977) *The German Ideology*, p. 164.
45. Marx (1977) *The German Ideology*, pp. 165–8.
46. With respect to needs and preferences, for example, we read in Marx (1973), p. 92 that 'production thus not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object. Thus production produces consumption (1) by creating the material for it; (2) by determining the manner of consumption; and (3) by creating the products initially posited by it as objects, in the form of a need felt by the consumer.' Cf. Marx (1977) *The German Ideology*, p. 166.

47. Marx (1977) *The German Ideology*, pp. 165–7.
48. By 'conceptually implied' I do not mean logically implied, but rather *universally* implied. The difference is that Marx's claims are not *necessarily* true, and thus are non-trivial claims. Yet they are not claims that are appropriate for empirical investigation since they conceptually constitute the kind of object that is being investigated.

49. Cf. Marx (1975) 'Notes on Adolph Wagner', pp. 190–2.
50. Where Elster quotes passages from Marx that indicate the contingent social development of rational capacities, he is invariably interested with issues that do not relate to the axiomatic status of instrumental rationality in his typology of explanations. For example, in Elster (1985), pp. 71–3, Elster quotes passages that refer to the development of species capacities, but his interest is only whether the subjects of this development are individual men, or Man. Elsewhere, on pp. 62–4, Elster is concerned only with whether Marx's distinctions between capacities of humans and those of animals are accurate.

51. The broader suggestion in Marx – one that emerges especially in his critique of Hegel – is that one should account for *all* activities that define species-being in terms of potentials of specific practices. To date, Jürgen Habermas's *The Theory of Communicative Action* is the most systematic attempt to work out the logic of practices in language, ethics and politics. See above, n. 9.

52. Weber (1949), p. 13.
53. See Max Weber, *Roscher and Knies: The Logical Problems of Historical Economics*, trans. Guy Oakes (New York: The Free Press, 1975), p. 192. Cf. Weber (1946), pp. 151–3. I am indebted to Wolfgang Schluchter's essay 'Value Neutrality and the Ethic of Responsibility', in *Max Weber's Vision of History*, ed. Wolfgang Schluchter and Guenther Roth (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), pp. 45–6; and E. B. Portis, 'Max Weber's Theory of Personality', *Sociological Inquiry* 48: 113–20.

55. Elster insists that 'methodological individualism is a doctrine about how social phenomena are to be explained, not about how they should be evaluated' (1985), p. 8. He is certainly correct if he means that methodological and ethical individualism are distinct positions, but wrong if he means that methodological individualism has no normative significance. Elster himself draws out one normative implication on pp. 117–18, where he points out that interpretations of Marxism as a theory of collective actors and functions helped to justify the 'disregard for individuals' from 'Stalin to the Red Guards'.

56. Marx (1977) *Grundrisse*, p. 380.
57. Marx continues by noting that this task cannot be achieved by every individual acting on their own, but only by the cooperative organisation of communist society (Marx 1977, *The German Ideology*, p. 190).

- properties of individuals. Levine, Sober and Elliott (1987, pp. 77–8) misunderstand this when they characterise methodological individualists (Elster included) as 'type reductionists'. They intend 'types' to refer to collective concepts in a theory, such as the notion of the 'fitness' of a species in the theory of natural selection, or 'class' in Marxism. Levine *et al.* argue that methodological individualism requires that such concepts be reduced to individual ones. What methodological individualists such as Watkins argue, however, is that concepts such as 'fitness' must ultimately be explicable, in principle, in terms of individuals and their environments. What is at issue for all but definitional methodological individualism is not whether holistic theoretical terms have a place in explanations, but rather the ontological status of their referents. Since Elster is not a definitional methodological individualist, the criticisms of Levine *et al.* miss the point. Watkins (1968), p. 270. Cf. Popper (1972), p. 341.
12. There is, however, a crucial confusion of individual and social categories when these methodological individualists allow 'interrelations of individuals' an explanatory status. Such statements are individualistic in the sense of *M₁*, only if these relations are the sum of the properties of individuals. If not, they are not 'rock-bottom'. If so, methodological individualism includes residual social relations with intersubjective properties such as language, and would therefore allow explanatory status to structural concepts. On this issue, see Miller (1978), pp. 388–91.
13. See, for example, Marx (1977) *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 'Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and General Philosophy', pp. 96–108.
14. See Marx (1977) *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, pp. 77–8, and Marx (1975) 'Notes on Adolph Wagner', pp. 190–1.
15. See Marx (1977) *The German Ideology*, p. 160.
16. Cf. the methodological portion of Marx (1973) 'Introduction', pp. 100–8.
17. Elster's position here is comparable to that in Popper (1966), Vol. 2, Ch. 14. Cf. Watkins (1968), pp. 272–4; Jarvie (1972), p. 156; Agassi (1960).
18. See, for example, Elster's comments on the importance of cognitive mechanisms (cognitive dissonance, framing, etc.) in explaining ideologies (Elster 1985, pp. 29–31, 487).
19. Michael Taylor correctly notes that Elster's 'three-tiered framework for explanation is a form of methodological individualism [my *M₁*] only if the causes of the attitudes and beliefs which cause action are themselves nothing but the actions and properties of individuals' (Taylor, M. 1986, p. 4).
20. See Taylor, C. (1980) for comments to this effect on Elster's *Logic and Society*.
21. See Elster's introduction to his edited volume *The Multiple Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
22. Contrast Jürgen Habermas's move away from purely instrumental conceptions of instrumental rationality in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).
23. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 208–9.
24. See Marx (1973), p. 83.
25. See Marx (1973), p. 84.
26. See Althusser (1971), and Poulantzas (1978), pp. 63–75.

27. Marx (1977) *The German Ideology*, p. 183.
28. Elster (1985), p. 5. Cf. the similar analogy in Watkins (1968), p. 270.
29. See for example Miller (1978), pp. 391–6; Slaughter (1986), pp. 45–56. For a standard reading of Weber's methodological individualism, see Lukes (1973), p. 111. See also Lukes (1977), Ch. 9.
30. See Weber (1978), p. 13.
31. See Weber (1949), p. 107.
32. See Weber (1978), p. 13.
33. See, for example, Miller (1978), p. 392; Slaughter (1986), p. 47; Lukes (1973), p. 111.
34. Steven Lukes's failure to make this distinction accounts for his confusion about Weber's methodological individualism. After categorising Weber with methodological individualists such as Hobbes, Saint-Simon and Comte (my *M₁*), Lukes writes in a note that 'Fortunately, Weber did not systematically follow this methodological principle in his substantive work', where 'structural factors' carry some of the explanatory burden (see Lukes 1973, p. 111). In contrast, my account suggests that Weber did follow his principles, but these were not the same as those of Hobbes *et al.* Cf. the similar confusion in Agassi (1960), pp. 259–61, where Weber is portrayed as caught between 'psychologism' – reduction of society to individual beliefs, and 'institutionalism' – determination of individual beliefs by institutional norms.
35. See Weber (1978), p. 11.
36. See Weber (1978), p. 14.
37. See Weber (1946), p. 280.
38. For Weber's concept of a rule, see Weber (1977), pp. 98–126.
39. Elster (1985), p. 6. Weber makes this distinction in (1978), p. 14.
40. Elster considers this objection in (1985, p. 460) as it might be put by Charles Taylor in Taylor, C. (1985), but he misunderstands its force: he defends his view that 'the theory of ideologies is in acute need of micro-foundations', about which he is quite right. 'To this assertion some will respond by saying that the web of social beliefs is in principle irreducible to individually acquired and individually held beliefs.' He interprets this objection as meaning that 'the full set of conceptual or linguistic practices may appear as a supra-individual entity that dominates and constrains the individual members of society'. Against this, he points out that there are cracks in the structure, and these appear when individuals cannot work within it, and set out to change it, but Elster is responding to objections such as Taylor's with a social ontology that polarises individual and society, and thus rules out the phenomena *a priori*. Thus his only response can be that if one allows social explanation of intentions, it must lead to an Althusserian spectre in which agents are entirely determined by supra-individual structures. The real alternative is a Wittgensteinian view of language and culture. Wittgenstein made explicit what Weber presupposes in his sociology: the meaning of rules is a question of how they are used within specific situations, forms of life. Individuals can, and do, use systems of symbols and roles in different ways, especially under changing material conditions, social relations, and so on. The issue is not whether individuals are fully determined by external structures, but rather whether language and other