METHODOLOGICAL INDIVIDUALISM AND SOCIAL EXPLANATION*

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Past criticisms to the contrary, methodological individualism in the social sciences is neither trivial nor obviously false. In the style of Weber's sociology, it restricts the ultimate explanatory repertoire of social science to agents' reasons for action. Although this restriction is not obviously false, it ought not to be accepted, at present, as a regulative principle. It excludes, as too far-fetched to merit investigation, certain hypotheses concerning the influence of objective interests on large-scale social phenomena. And these hypotheses, in fact, merit empirical consideration. The attractiveness of methodological individualism as a regulative principle depends on two independent confusions, the conflation of an agent's reasons for action with the beliefs, needs, desires, or goals which are the reasons why he acted as he did, and the identification of explaining a phenomenon and describing its causes.

For over twenty years, Karl Popper, J.W.N. Watkins and others have argued for methodological individualism, the doctrine that social phenomena must be explainable in terms of the psychologies and situations of the participants in those phenomena. This statement of methodological individualism is vague, because the claims put forward in the name of that doctrine have seemed to many readers to be extremely diverse. Is there, however, a version of methodological individualism, figuring prominently in writings of the individualists themselves, which is both plausible (in that a reasonable person might, on reflection, accept it as true) and nontrivial (in that there are sociological claims of significant popularity which would not be put forward if their proponents were fully conscious of the truth of methodological individualism)? The majority of writers on methodological individualism claim that no such version exists. According to these critics, methodological individualism either consists of doctrines which no reasonable person could accept once he fully understands their implications, or consists of doctrines which fail to exclude

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any current sociological theses, including the Marxist explanations which are the individualists' modern *bete noire*.[1] The continued attractiveness of methodological individualism is typically ascribed to a muddled and unconscious shifting between the implausible and the trivial versions of the doctrine.

These critics of methodological individualism are, I shall argue, mistaken. There is a version of methodological individualism that is both plausible and nontrivial. At the same time, this version of methodological individualism, plausible though it is, is not, in fact, a valid methodological principle. When I argue for the nontriviality and the nonvalidity of the relevant version of methodological individualism, Marxist sociology will be my main case of a source of nonindividualist explanations. I shall argue that the individualist principle in question ought not to be accepted in the relatively a priori spirit in which it is offered. If my criticisms are fair, any nontrivial version of methodological individualism must exclude appeals to nonrational processes which certainly do control behavior in small-group interactions and may well do so in historically significant large-scale social phenomena.

If my argument is right, the two decades of attack on methodological individualism have largely been a misfortune for the social sciences. The critics of methodological individualism have concentrated their fire on extremely implausible versions of methodological individualism, which in practice constrain no one working in the social sciences. Meanwhile, an individualist doctrine that exercises a real restraining influence has remained unscathed.

The main text I shall rely on as a source of individualist doctrines is Watkins' concise and relatively clear exposition of methodological individualism, "Historical Explanation in the Social Sciences" [13]. In this essay, Watkins says, "There 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 shall not have arrived at rock-bottom explanations of such large-scale phenomena until we have deduced an account of them from statements about the dispositions, beliefs, resources, and interrelations of individuals. (The individuals may remain anonymous and only typical dispositions, etc., may be attributed to them)" ([13], p. 271). In context, this remark of Watkins' seems to amount to the following claim:

Proposition I (The Individualist Constraint on Explanation): There

[1] Typical and influential criticisms of the first sort are offered by Gellner [6], Goldstein [7], Lukes [8], and Mandelbaum [9]. The compatibility of methodological individualism with Marxism is asserted by Cunningham [3].

must be a rock-bottom explanation of every large-scale social phenomenon which explains the phenomenon as solely due to the beliefs and dispositions of actual or typical individuals and the situations to which they respond in accordance with their beliefs and dispositions.

With certain clarifications, Proposition I appears a much more plausible doctrine than methodological individualism is usually said to be. This proposition imposes a constraint on explanation in the social sciences, but not on the ultimate vocabulary of the social sciences. It does not require that the claims of social scientists be expressible in a language, no individual term of which refers to a phenomenon entailing the existence of a society. Very likely, no individualistic *definition* of "marriage," for example, can be given. But if a marriage custom can be explained as due to participants' beliefs about marriage, the individualistic constraint on explanation is still satisfied.

Proposition I is restricted in scope to "rock-bottom" explanations of "large-scale social phenomena." By the latter phrase, Watkins seems to mean the relatively complex social phenomena, involving long-lived institutions and affecting the lives of many people, which are objects of investigation for historians, historically-minded sociologists, and cultural anthropologists. Thus, at one point, Watkins says that no statements compatible with methodological individualism can explain reflex-like group behavior in which "some kind of physical connection between people's nervous systems . . . causes automatic, and perhaps in some sense appropriate, bodily responses." But he remarks that such actions are not a sufficient basis for "typical long-lived institutions, like a bank, or a legal system or a church" and do not "endure . . . through generations of men" ([13], pp. 273f).

In restricting the scope of his constraint to the "rock-bottom" level, Watkins is allowing that explanations which do not, superficially, meet his constraint may do so by a certain indirect route. To satisfy Proposition I, a sociological explanation either must show how the phenomenon in question is due to beliefs, dispositions, and situations of actual or typical individuals (I shall call such explanations "wholly individualistic"), or it must solely refer to processes, tendencies, or causal links which are explainable, in turn, as due to such beliefs, dispositions and situations (the indirect route). Thus, every sociological explanation must either be wholly individualistic, or rest on the rock of a further, wholly individualistic explanation.

As Watkins makes clear at several points in his essay, "rock-bottom" does not mean "final" ([13], pp. 280, 275f). To adapt an example of Watkins', an individualist must require that an explanation of a

population pattern in terms of tribal marriage customs rest on an individualistic explanation of those customs, perhaps in terms of beliefs and dispositions concerning incest. But the existence of the latter beliefs and dispositions might well stand in need of further explanation. And the further explanation that initially comes to mind need not be wholly individualistic.[2]

In at least one other way, the demand for a rock-bottom individualistic explanation is weaker than it might seem. To make a justifiable claim that a wholly individualistic explanation of a phenomenon exists, one need not be prepared to construct one, or even to claim that it is humanly possible to do so. To employ another example of Watkins', one might make one's claim in the spirit of a physicist's assertion that there is an explanation of blast-effects of a particular bomb-explosion in terms of the trajectories and velocities of individual molecules. This claim could be valid, and even justifiable, although it is not humanly possible to construct such an explanation.

Our discussions so far have tended to show that Proposition I is less implausible than it might at first appear to be. But can this proposition avoid the opposite defect of triviality? To answer this question, we need a more precise understanding of "disposition," as the term is used in Proposition I. This interpretative problem is at once the most difficult and the most important one, for a proper understanding of Watkins' individualism.

Philosophers sometimes use "disposition" in a sense, which I shall call "the philosophy of science sense," in which "*x* has a disposition to *F* in circumstances *C*" is fully paraphrased by "should *x* be in circumstances *C*, it will *F*." When Watkins speaks of dispositions, in imposing his individualistic constraint on explanation, is he using the term in this broad philosophy of science sense? Clearly, he is not. For one thing, Watkins, as previously noted, admits that reflex-like, purely automatic behavior has no explanation satisfying the constraint he imposes. By way of citing examples of such non-individualistic phenomena he says, "I think that a man may more or less literally smell danger and instinctively back away from unseen ambushers; and individuality seems to be temporarily submerged beneath a collective physical rapport . . . among panicking crowds" ([13], pp. 273f.). Perhaps it is true, as Watkins seems to imagine, that panic behavior sometimes has no individual mental cause, not even the sudden onset of fear in the panicking individual. Still, if "disposition" were understood in the philosophy of science sense,

[2] Cf. the criticism of methodological individualism for ignoring cultural conditioning in [7].

then Watkins' examples of automatic responses, and any other examples, could be explained within the confines of Proposition I, the possibility Watkins denies. A crowd's flight from fire, no matter how automatic, could be explained as due to their disposition to run away from the vicinity of intense heat and smoke. There is also a further reason to suppose that the relevant sense of "disposition" is fairly narrow. Watkins subsequently makes it clear that the explanations characteristic of Marxist social theory are, in his view, incompatible with methodological individualism. Marx's idea that the view of social reality taken by a typical member of an economic class is determined by the economic interests of that class appears to be especially objectionable to Watkins ([13], p. 275). But Watkins could not use Proposition I to rule out Marxist explanations if "disposition" were used in the philosophy of science sense. Otherwise, one would, for example, be giving a rock-bottom individualist explanation in saying, "The belief of a typical capitalist that strikes are bad is due to the disposition of a typical member of an economically dominant class to have beliefs which justify the pursuit of the economic interests typical of his class." In general, the appropriate reading of "disposition" must be narrower than the philosophy of science sense, or the individualist constraint on explanation will lapse into triviality.

What narrower concept of "disposition" can we adopt in Proposition I, without making the latter proposition implausibly restrictive? The question is a difficult one. Watkins' own intentions are obscure. But in one of his articles he does offer a valuable clue to the plausible, nontrivial interpretation of individualist "dispositions," when he identifies the methodological chapters of Max Weber's *Economy and Society* as the classic presentation of methodological individualism by a major sociologist.[3]

Sociology, for Weber, is the science "which attempts the interpretative understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal interpretation of its course and effects. In 'action' is included all human behavior when and insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it. . . . Action is social insofar as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual (or individuals), it takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby

[3] [14]. See especially pp. 83f. As Watkins emphasizes in this article, methodological individualism is characteristic of Weber's final outlook, which received its most encyclopedic and influential expression in *Economy and Society* (written in 1916–1919, published posthumously in 1922). Such earlier writings as "Objectivity in the Social Sciences" (1903) present a less individualistic methodology. My own view is that Weber's approach to social science became increasingly individualistic and psychologistic as his opposition to Marxism, both in theorizing and in political practice, intensified.

oriented in its course" ([17], p. 88). Some of Weber's subsequent examples of a subjective meaning (*subjecktiv gemeinter Sinn*) attached to an act are: someone's reasons for carrying out a multiplication or proving a theorem in a certain way, the goals of someone "trying to achieve certain ends by choosing appropriate means," "anxiety, anger, ambition, envy, jealousy, love, enthusiasm, pride, vengefulness, loyalty, devotion and appetites of all sorts" ([17], pp. 91f).

In the previously cited article, Watkins makes it clear that individualistic explanations in terms of "dispositions" are Weberian explanations in terms of "subjective meanings" that agents attach to their actions. This is fully in the spirit of *Economy and Society,* where Weber himself employs the definition of sociology in terms of subjective meaning to argue for individualist constraints on social science. (For example, he says, ". . . 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" ([17], p. 101).) But what is a subjective meaning of an act?

The definition of sociology, and numerous parallel discussions, together with the quoted examples, and many others that Weber gives, all point to the following notion of subjective meaning: a subjective meaning is a subject's reason for acting as he did. Y is a subjective meaning X attaches to his action, Z, at time t, just in case Y is a reason for action that X has at time t, and X did Z at that time because he had this reason.

For the purposes of this definition, X need not have consciously formulated the reason, Y. On the other hand, a desire, goal, or need is to be counted as someone's reason for action if, were he asked whether it is, he would respond that it was, if he were sincere, his memory sufficiently clear and sharp, his analytical skills adequate, and if no psychological mechanism of repression were operating. (I shall assume throughout that the attribution of repression is otiose if it is not reflected in felt tension, anxiety, or some other symptom.) Finally, "action," as used in the definition, is meant very broadly. In particular, X's "action" may be the formation or maintenance of a belief.

This emphasis on reasons is perfectly compatible with Weber's insistence that subjectively meaningful behavior may be irrational (see, e.g., [17], p. 92). When I irrationally flee from a harmless garden snake my reason for running away may be an irrational fear of snakes.

While the realm of subjective meaning is extremely broad, it has its limits. One obvious limit is suggested by Weber's distinction between

"meaningful action and merely reactive behavior to which no subjective meaning is attached" ([17], p. 90). Actions performed purely out of habit are not subjectively meaningful. Once, long ago, I decided I would look better if I parted my hair on the left. But this morning I did so quite automatically and routinely. It was not true this morning that my reason for doing so was that I would look better that way. My typical hair-partings are no longer subjectively meaningful.

Even when someone behaves in a certain way on account of desires, goals, or needs that he has, those desires, goals, or needs might not constitute subjective meanings that he attaches to his behavior. *Ex hypothesi,* they are *reasons why* he acted as he did, i.e., explanations of why he so acted. But they need not be *his reasons* for so acting.

There is nothing esoteric about this distinction between an agent's desires, needs or goals which are the reason why he acted as he did and the agent's reason for so acting. Consider this banal episode. Bill is a grocer. John, who lives above the shop, comes down and asks for credit. "I'm broke and out of work now," he says, but adds, with all signs of sincerity, "I'm sure to get a job within a month." Bill knows that John possesses overwhelming evidence that he will probably be out of work for many months. When he proposes to John, "You're just saying you'll get a job soon because you want credit," his neighbour responds with what looks like the most honest hurt at an insult, and leaves the shop.

How should Bill interpret his neighbour's saying that he will soon have a job? Bill might have independent grounds for believing that John is an extremely honest person, who, if he lied under extreme pressure, would show much anxiety and hesitation, no signs of which were, in fact, present in the scene at the store. Bill might also know that John is astute enough to comprehend the evidence available to him that he won't soon get a job. Given his knowledge of John's situation, character, and behavior, Bill might chose the following as the best explanation of why John described his job chances as he did: John really believed he would get a job soon, when he said he would. This belief was due to John's need to obtain credit together with his need to continue to see himself as an honest person. The satisfaction of these needs was not *his* reason for believing he was sure to get a job soon. He sincerely rejected this hypothesis. But satisfaction of these needs was *the* reason why he believed what he did. Or, as Bill might, more likely, put it, "He believed what he said. But when they need credit, people believe the strangest things about their finances."

I have described this case in detail to make it clear that no extraordinary or special insight is involved in the justified assertion

that the reason for an agent's action consists of needs, desires, or goals which were not *his* reason for so acting. Such an assertion might be the best explanation in light of quite ordinary knowledge of his character, his needs, his situation, his behavior, and how others with similar character have behaved in similar cases. (Bill would have been justifiably reluctant to explain as he did were this the first time he had seen someone assert what that person ought to have known to be false when relevant dishonesty or stupidity were unlikely, on independent grounds.) As Marx and Engels say, in the *German Ideology,* the distinction between agents' reasons for actions and actual reasons for actions is one that every shopkeeper can make in ordinary life ([10], p. 67).

Of course, social scientists rarely have the detailed knowledge of someone's character, needs, situation, and behavior that Bill has of John's. But they usually pursue explanations of why a typical person of a certain kind behaves in a certain way. And here, there may well be knowledge concerning the typical situation, character, behavior and needs, goals or desires of a person of that kind sufficient to justify an explanation of the behavior in question as typically due to needs, goals or desires which are not the agent's reasons for so behaving.

Again, the sort of inference made is not specialized or esoteric. Suppose I were to believe, as many people do, that most nuclear engineers possess evidence which shows that nuclear reactors are unsafe, given present safeguards, and also to believe that nuclear engineers are, typically, honest and intelligent. I might justify these beliefs in a variety of ways. There is no difficulty in principle, here. In light of these background beliefs, I seek to explain why most nuclear engineers say reactors are safe, with present safeguards. The best explanation is, "Nuclear engineers say reactors are safe because they want to regard their life-work as of great social utility." Here, I might, rely, in part, on a warranted belief about professionals in our society, that they want to regard their work as important to society. I need not rely on particular acquaintance with particular nuclear engineers. And my claim is quite compatible with the existence of atypical engineers who regard reactors as safe out of ignorance or stupidity, or who make safety claims which they do not believe out of corporate pressure.

As I shall soon emphasize, Marxist social theory depends, to a high degree, on the assertion that a typical occupant of a social role has certain beliefs because of desires, needs, or goals associated with that role which are the reasons for his belief, but not his reasons for his belief. The explanations of this sort which Marx gives are

sometimes original and surprising, always controversial. But I hope to have shown that they are not original or controversial in form. Quite apart from controversial or specialized social theory, it is a common and legitimate practice to propose that an explanation of action in terms of needs, desires, or goals which are not the subject's reasons for action is the best explanation in light of a constellation of relevant facts.

If an explanation of a pattern of behavior explains it as due to desires, goals, or needs of the agent which are not his reasons for so behaving, I shall call it an explanation of behavior as due to *objective interests.* (Robert Stalnaker has pointed out to me that this expression is somewhat misleading, since the relevant desire or goal might be self-destructive. But some short phrase is needed. And the actual explanations to which I shall appeal involve no self-destructive tendencies.) Weberian sociology excludes patterns of behavior which are solely explainable as due to objective interests. I shall subsequently argue that this limitation ought not to be adopted as a methodological principle.

At one point in his later writings, Weber comes close to explicitly distinguishing subjective meanings from desires, goals, and needs which are the reasons, but not the agents' reasons, for actions. In an article which he subsequently cites, in *Economy and Society* ([17], p. 87), as a stricter and more detailed explanation of basic concepts of meaningful social action, he distinguishes subjective rationality in terms of goals (*subjektive Zweckrationalität*) as something utterly different from objective rationality in terms of correctness (*objektive Richtigkeitsrationalität*). An action carried out under the guidance of goals which are the agent's reasons for action has the former, subjective rationality. An action or other phenomenon which actually attains ends, which may not be agent's reasons for actions, but are a concern of the social scientist studying the action, has the latter, objective rationality. After a rough sketch of the distinction, Weber continues:

> Apart from certain elements of psychoanalysis which have this characteristic [i.e., reference to objective rationality] a construction such as Neitzsche's theory of envy involves an explanation which out of the practical features of a constellation of interests displays the objective rationality of external behavior, a rationality which is noticed barely, if at all, because it is 'unintelligible' on a subjectively meaningful basis. It is precisely the same, methodologically speaking, with economic materialism. ([15], p. 434)

Thus, explanations asserting the objective rationality of actions, as fulfilling objective interests, need not explain them as due to subjective meanings, i.e., agents' reasons.

In the rest of this essay, I shall assume that dispositions in the sense of Proposition I are subjective meanings, agents' reasons for actions. I shall sometimes speak of them as "motives," sometimes as "psychological dispositions," but the Weberian sense will always be intended.[4]

Proposition I, as I have interpreted it, makes a plausible claim. Weber, for example, in a previously cited passage, proposes, in effect, that sociology be confined to the study of social action explainable within the constraints of Proposition I. A commitment to the Weberian program surely is not, in itself, a mark of unreasonableness or lack of understanding.

Assuming that Proposition I expresses a plausible principle, does it, in fact, express a valid methodological principle? I shall argue that it does not. By a valid methodological principle, I mean a principle with at least two features: (a) commitment to it does not prevent one from attaining a true picture of reality in the sciences in question; (b) if one discovers that one cannot be in a position to put forward a given claim while still maintaining the methodological principle in question, that fact is always, in itself, a good reason for abandoning that claim. Thus, if a principle is methodologically valid, it is reasonable to employ it as a plausibility criterion. If acceptance of a theory would require violation of the principle, the theory is, by that token, too far-fetched to merit further appraisal. (Note that a plausible principle may be a bad criterion of plausibility. To take the most obvious kind of obstacle, there may be a rival, incompatible principle which is also plausible.) Watkins clearly believes that his constraint on explanation is a valid methodological principle in this sense. For when he recommends it, he characterizes it as a methodological principle, a regulative principle, and a principle which encourages research in some directions while discouraging research in others ([13], pp. 269f.).

I shall argue for the methodological invalidity of Proposition I by

[4] A slight difference between Weber's usages and Watkins' creates a minor problem, here. Beliefs can be agents' reasons for action, just as much as desires. Such beliefs are "subjective meanings" for Weber. But Watkins seems to restrict "dispositions" to agents' reasons which are desires, wants or goals. I shall use "disposition" in the broad sense of "agent's reason," to avoid the need sharply to distinguish the cognitive from the conative aspect of reasons. But I shall often speak, redundantly, of "beliefs and psychological dispositions" to preserve parallelism with the terminology of principles such as Proposition I.

means of counterexamples. My main counterexample is taken from Marxist social theory. I shall argue that Marxists are not in a position to put forward certain characteristic claims about the bourgeoisie while maintaining Proposition I, but that this is not, in itself, a good reason for them to abandon any aspect of Marxist social theory. If so, Proposition I fails to possess feature (b).

Marxists and many other people believe that the following large-scale social phenomenon is characteristic of modern societies: a typical major, active capitalist regards the interests of big business as coinciding with the interests of the nation as a whole. In other words, he believes that actions and policies which maximize, on the whole, the wealth and power of the large firms which dominate his nation's economy also maximize, on the whole, the welfare of the people of the nation. For purposes of convenience, I shall sometimes refer to this belief as the identification of the bourgeois and the national interest.[5] Throughout his long career, which extended through the darkest days of the Great Depression, Alfred Sloan, chairman of the board of General Motors, used to express this identification with the pungency of proverb: "What is good for General Motors," he would declare, "is good for America."

The belief phenomenon I have sketched is large-scale and enduring. If it cannot be explained as due to the beliefs and psychological dispositions of actual or typical individuals, many other phenomena asserted to exist in Marxist discussions of ideology will similarly conflict with Proposition I. Can it be so explained? Not if Marxists are correct in their view of the relevant facts.

It might be felt that a typical capitalist identifies the bourgeois and the national interests as a result of his encounters with evidence indicating that this identity holds. The belief in question could then be explained individualistically, as due to the businessman's reasons for forming the belief, namely, his possession of other, evidential beliefs and his desire to form an accurate notion of the national interest on the basis of the evidence available to him. If Marxists are right, however, in their conception of the activities of the bourgeoi-

[5] This same phrase might be used to describe a different, though related, belief-phenomenon, the tendency, whenever an action or policy is in fact in the interests of the bourgeoisie, to regard it as in the national interest. Marx regards the major active capitalists of modern capitalist countries as sufficiently class-conscious to have both tendencies. But tendencies of these respective sorts need not go together. Perhaps there have been peasantries from whom these tendencies split. When a policy or action is in the interests of the peasantry, they regard it as in the interests of society as a whole. But they are so unused or reluctant to think in anything like class terms that they do not have the belief that what is in the interests of the peasantry is in the interests of society as a whole.

sie, this explanation is not typically true. Especially in advanced capitalist societies such as our own, major active capitalists are seen as strike-breakers, war-makers, and instigators of periodic political repression, who are in possession of overwhelming evidence to the effect that the bourgeois interest and the interest of most people in the nation are not identical. Thus, Marxists cannot explain the formation of the belief in question as due to standard learning processes.

Given the view of the relevant facts characteristic of Marxist and many non-Marxist theorists, the belief-phenomenon in question is best explained as due to objective interests, not to psychological dispositions. A typical major capitalist identifies the bourgeois and the national interest because such belief serves a variety of his desires and goals. For one thing, he has a goal of promoting this belief in others. And it is easier and less tense to encourage a belief in others if you share it. Also, he possesses overwhelming evidence that policies of lay-off, speed-up, pollution and war which he instigates or encourages hurt most people. If he were to accept this conclusion, he would feel much the worse for it. So, to achieve the peace of mind he desires, he must encounter the evidence strongly prejudiced toward the belief that the interests of big business actually coincide with the interests of most people, despite apparent evidence to the contrary. Of course, these desires and goals are not *his* reasons for making the crucial identification. He would emphatically, honestly, and serenely reject this explanation of his belief.

Marxism conflicts with Proposition I in that a Marxist is in no position to suppose that a certain belief-phenomenon crucial to Marxist social theory has an individualistic explanation. Watkins would gladly accept this conclusion and would claim that this conflict is a good reason for abandoning Marxism. If he did not view the conflict in this way, he could not propose Proposition I as a methodologically valid principle. Watkins, moreover, offers reasons for taking conflict with Proposition I as grounds for dismissing a theory, by presenting two arguments to the effect that Proposition I must be true. Both arguments, I shall maintain, are bad ones.

Shortly after presenting the constraint on explanation that has been under discussion, Watkins presents the following proposition, and calls it "the central assumption of the individualist position":

> [No] social tendency exists which could not be altered *if* the individuals concerned both wanted to alter it, and possessed the appropriate information. (They might want to alter the tendency but, through ignorance of the facts and/or failure to work out some of the implications of their action, fail to alter it, or perhaps

> even intensify it.) . . . (I do not call 'social' those tendencies which are determined by uncontrollable physical factors, such as the alleged tendency for more male babies to be born in times of disease or war). ([13], p. 271f.)

The claim Watkins is making might be stated more briefly as follows:

Proposition II (The Alteration Principle): Any social tendency would be altered if the individuals concerned had the appropriate beliefs and desires as their reasons for action, and if there were no unremovable physical obstacles to change.

Watkins presents the Alteration Principle without argument, as if it were obviously true. Yet its truth is by no means obvious. There seem to be people who want to give up smoking, possess all appropriate information about giving up smoking, yet cannot give up smoking. Doctors label their condition "*psychological* addiction," suggesting that the obstacle to change is no more physical than any other force guiding human conduct. Very likely, this smokers' syndrome depends too little on enduring institutions to be counted as a large-scale social phenomenon, by Watkins. But pessimistic social scientists have sometimes portrayed large-scale social phenomena as reflecting something like psychological addiction on a ghastly scale. For example, given the pervasive desire for peace throughout most societies and the failure of nearly all societies to avoid war, some social scientists explain the prevalence of war as a result of tendencies toward aggressive response, territoriality, and xenophobia too deep-seated to be overcome by appropriate knowledge and a desire for peace. Such pessimism may be wrong. Watkins would find Marx a perhaps unwelcome ally in rejecting it. But the pessimists' apparent denial of the Alteration Principle is not so obviously wrong as to be rejected *a priori,* and, indeed, without argument of any kind.

Still, the Alteration Principle might achieve methological validity if suitably qualified and refined. Perhaps "appropriate desires" should be expanded to "appropriate desires of strong enough intensity." Perhaps "unremoveable physical obstacles" are usefully understood as including all consequences of human genetic structure. I shall not pursue these possibilities, though I suspect such modifications would leave the Alteration Principle either too dubious or too tautologous for Watkins' purpose. There is a simpler problem with Watkins' use of Proposition II. Even if it were methodologically valid, the truth (much less the methodological validity) of Proposition I would not follow. Even if different beliefs and desires functioning as agents' reasons for action, could change any large-scale social tendency, there

might be large-scale social phenomena which are not explainable as due to agents' reasons.

Suppose, as the Alteration Principle requires, that any social phenomenon *would* be otherwise, if people's reasons for action *were* to include certain beliefs and desires. It by no means follows that every social phenomenon is *in actuality* explainable in terms of such factors. It may be that a large-scale social phenomenon cannot be explained by appealing to agents' reasons, even though its existence depends on the *absence* of certain agents' reasons.

The following example shows that the kind of possibility I have sketched is more than a bare logical possibility. According to Watkins, a crowd in a theatre which panics and runs in a purely automatic reflex reaction to smoke and fire is acting in a way which cannot be explained solely by reference to their beliefs and psychological dispositions in the situation at hand. Their action, as it were, short-circuits the belief-and-psychological-disposition mechanism. But it is certainly true, nonetheless, that such a group of people would act differently if they had different beliefs and psychological dispositions, e.g., if they believed that the smoke and fire were part of the show and had, as their reason for staying, the desire to watch the spectacle. By the same token, someone who denies that the identification of the bourgeois and the national interests is due to beliefs and dispositions can also accept that this identification would break down if capitalists' reasons for action were to include certain beliefs and dispositions now characteristic of militant trade-unionists.

Watkins' second argument for his constraint on explanation occurs in the course of a criticism (and, as I argue in footnote 6, a misrepresentation) of the Marxist theory of ideology.

> Marx for instance professed to believe that feudal ideas and bourgeois ideas are more or less literally generated by the water-mill and the steam-engine. But no description, however complete, of the productive apparatus of a society, or of any other non-psychological factors, will enable you to deduce a single psychological conclusion from it, because psychological statements logically cannot be deduced from wholly non-psychological statements. Thus . . . the idea that an explanation which begins by imputing some social phenomenon to human factors cannot go on to explain those factors in terms of some inhuman determinant of them is a necessary truth. That the human mind develops under various influences the methodological individualist does not, of course, deny. He only insists that such development must be explained 'innocently' as a series of responses by the individual to situations

> and not 'sinisterly' and illogically as a direct causal outcome of non-psychological factors, whether these are neurological factors, or impersonal sociological factors alleged to be at work in history.[6]([13], p. 275)

Here, Watkins appears to be arguing that the individualist theory of explanation is true, and, indeed, a necessary truth. If he is not, his words are certainly quite misleading. If this is his goal, his reasoning surely includes the following argument for Proposition I: all large-scale social phenomena are caused by the intentional actions of individuals, actions guided by beliefs and psychological dispositions. A phenomenon of this sort cannot be explained using wholly nonpsychological statements, which make no reference to beliefs and psychological dispositions. Therefore, the individualistic constraint on explanation must be valid. Every explanation of a large-scale social phenomenon must solely refer to beliefs and dispositions of individuals and situations to which they respond in accordance with their beliefs and dispositions.

This argument is simply fallacious. Even granting the initial steps (which might themselves be questioned), it follows that every explanation of a large-scale social phenomenon must, when fully spelled out, refer *in part* to individualistic psychological phenomena. It by no means follows that such an explanation must solely refer to such phenomena. Obviously a statement about social phenomena caused by intentional actions can be deduced from a set of statements that only partly refer to individualistic psychological phenomena. Lenin's explanation of the origins of World War I mostly consists of descriptions of objective class-interests. But Lenin is certainly committed to the view that objective class-interests, in a certain objective setting, make major capitalists *want* war and make such desires their reasons for

[6] In his initial statement about Marx, Watkins must have in mind the concluding sentence from the following paragraph in Marx's early polemic against Proudhon, *The Poverty of Philosophy:*

> M. Proudhon the economist understands very well that men make cloth, linen or silk materials in definite relations of production. But what he has not understood is that these definite social relations are just as much produced by men as line, flax, etc. Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord, the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist. ([11], p. 109)

The last sentence is the only passage in Marx which might, in isolation, suggest a belief in the more or less literal generation of feudal ideas and bourgeois ideas from kinds of machinery. I leave it to the reader to determine whether this is a reasonable interpretation when the sentence is read in context.

action. Marx's theory of ideology is largely concerned with descriptions of objective interests and objective work-situations. But he is certainly committed to propositions stating that class-interests mold *beliefs*.

Marxism is far from the only source of explanations which Proposition I might lead someone illegitimately to dismiss. Social anthropology is another common source of anti-individualistic explanations. Consider, for example, the following aspect of Evans-Pritchard's account of beliefs concerning witches among the Azande, a people of the southern Sudan ([5], pp. 23ff.). Azande believe that being a witch is a heritable biological property, invariably inherited by the sons of a witch father and the daughters of a witch mother. Yet when, as frequently happens, the Azande are convinced that a man is a witch, they at most conclude that males in his immediate family are witches, never that all his patrilineal male kin are witches, as their theory requires. The insight and ingenuity that Azande show in political, agricultural, and other pursuits rules out stupidity as the explanation for this failure to accept the implications of Azande theories. Evans-Pritchard proposes that the Azandes' failure to regard all patrilineal male kin of a man they regard as a witch as witches is due to the fact that the Azande, if they accepted this inference (and a parallel one for women), would soon find that nearly everyone was a witch, so that accusations of witchcraft would lose their valuable social function of reducing economic inequalities which would otherwise tear apart Azande village communities. (Excessive striving promotes resentment in other Azande. Given the nature of the oracles that certify people as witches, an object of widespread resentment in a village is bound to be so certified.)

Most anthropologists would accept that the Azande fail to acknowledge entailments of their own beliefs about witches because this failure is strongly in their interests. But this interest clearly does not constitute a typical Azande's reason for not accepting the entailment. In a sense, it could not. If witchcraft-belief were regarded by most Azande as a piece of social engineering, such belief would lose its hold, and fail as social engineering.

My argument so far is, I have discovered, unsatisfying to many readers. The main source of this dissatisfaction is, I shall now argue, a confusion between explanation and the description of causes.

Many people insist on the validity of Proposition I, using arguments that might be spelled out as follows: every large-scale social phenomenon is created and maintained by the acts of individuals. These acts are, typically, the results of the beliefs and motives of the respective agents at the time of the action, beliefs and motives which are the

respective agents' reasons for the individual acts. Acts not explainable in this manner, for example, slips of the tongue, play no crucial role in social causation. So every social phenomenon is caused by agents' reasons. This individualism about causes is common to every widely held social theory. A Marxist, for example, regards ideology as the product of a kind of informal training in habits of belief, a training consisting of acts guided by inculcators' beliefs and dispositions at the moments of action. Capitalists, he thinks, generally identify the bourgeois and the national interests because of a multitude of acts like the following: a future capitalist's being told by his father, "Smart, energetic people succeed. The poor are just lazy"; a fledgling capitalist's being congratulated by a superior for making an eloquent speech on the convergence of the interests of their corporation and the needs of the nation. The huge number of acts causing the tendency the Marxist asserts to exist are due to a huge number of agents' reasons, for example, the father's desire to discourage his son's sentimentalism and encourage him to succeed, the company president's admiration for the eloquence and good sense of the subordinate. An explanation—Marxist or otherwise—need not actually describe the individualist causes of a social phenomenon. But if one cannot hold a given theory and, at the same time, accept that a true description of this sort can in principle be constructed, that is a basis for rejecting the theory as implausible. Hence, methodological individualism is methodologically valid, though trivial in that it excludes no widely held current doctrine.

This objection contains many grains of truth. For one thing, the following principle does seem to be methodologically valid:

Proposition III (The Individualist Constraint on Causation). Every social phenomenon is caused by the acts of individuals. Except for atypical and noncrucial cases, these acts are caused, in turn, by the beliefs and psychological dispositions of the agents.

I argued that Proposition I was not methodologically valid and was incompatible with Marxism. But Proposition III is methodologically valid and (a second grain of truth in the objection) quite compatible with Marxism. When Engels said "Men make their own history . . . in that each individual follows his own consciously desired end" ([4], p. 366), he meant to accept the individualist constraint on causation.

Given all these concessions, I can only reject the objection at hand if I deny that Proposition III entails Proposition I. And that is precisely my claim. The entailment fails because in social science explaining a large-scale social phenomenon often requires explaining why it would

have happened even in the absence of the sequence of individual actions, beliefs, or dispositions which actually caused it.[7] More specifically, social scientists observe the following principle, in pursuing explanations:

Proposition IV (The Necessity Constraint): If, given conditions obtaining at the time, X would have happened anyway, even in the absence of the sequence of individual actions, beliefs, or dispositions which actually did cause X, then an explanation of X must explain why X would have happened under the circumstances, even in the absence of that particular sequence.

Where the necessity constraint applies, the description of individualist causes the availability of which is guaranteed by Proposition III will not provide an explanation. For an explanation must show why the phenomenon in question would have happened anyway, even if that description were false. For example, if the necessity constraint applies to the capitalist belief-phenomenon that we have been examining, the individualist saga of indoctrination and encouragement previously sketched will not explain that phenomenon. The individualist story may still answer the question, "Why do the particular people who actually are major capitalists, namely, John D. Rockefeller III, David Lindsay, Walter Wriston, and others, typically identify the bourgeois and the national interests?" But it is not even intended to answer the question singled out by the necessity constraint, "Why, in a modern capitalist society, would major capitalists, whoever they might be, typically identify the bourgeois and the national interests, even if Rockefeller, Lindsay, and the other actual capitalists were to have different life histories?"

Three aspects of the necessity constraint require elaboration, or else that constraint will seem to refer only to rigidly deterministic processes. In the first place, the necessity sought in Proposition IV is relative to social conditions in the background of the large-scale social phenomenon to be explained. The object of explanation is why X would have happened anyway, in the absence of the individualist causal chain that actually produced it, but in the presence of conditions obtaining at the time in question. This relative necessity is, surely, what a social scientist demands when he asks, "Why would X have happened, even if Y had not produced it?" He is not presupposing that X was bound to occur from the beginning of time, or, less metaphysically, from the time the planet earth came into being. He

[7] I was helped to see this point by discussions with Alan Garfinkel. I am not sure that Garfinkel would agree with this specific claim.

is not supposing that *X* would have happened, no matter what the nature of the society in which it happened. Rather, he is assuming that under some set of conditions, current at the time in question, *X* would have arisen in some other way, if it were not produced by *Y*. For example, when a Marxist claims that a world war would have broken out around 1914, even in the absence of the chain of events involving the assassination of Archduke Rudolf, he obviously means that a world war would have occurred anyway, given the political and economic relations among major capitalist powers at the time. In Lenin's *Imperialism,* the classic Marxist argument that a world war would have broken out in the absence of the chain of individualist episodes that actually caused it, Lenin's whole case is built upon the description of new forms of capitalist activity, creating distinctive conditions for international relations, which arose at the turn of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the Marxist might regard the existence of the conditions in question as noninevitable, because, for example, the rise of capitalist societies on the planet earth was not inevitable, given the total state of the planet in certain precapitalist times.[8]

When social necessity is made relative to a particular social setting in this way, asserting that a large-scale social phenomenon would have occurred in the absence of the acts, beliefs and psychological dispositions which actually produced it does not violate Proposition II, the alteration principle. For assuming that under the social conditions of the time a phenomenon would have occurred even in the absence of the beliefs and dispositions which actually did bring it about does not mean assuming that phenomenon to be compatible with just any beliefs and dispositions. The mechanisms guaranteeing that phenomenon may do so, in part, by preventing the occurrence of beliefs and dispositions incompatible with its existence. For example, the mechanisms responsible for the identification of the bourgeois and national interests by major capitalists must prevent the social role, major capitalist, from largely being filled by individuals whose beliefs and dispositions are, on the whole, those now characteristic of communists.

The necessity pursued according to Proposition IV is weak in one other respect. It might be true that the phenomenon in question would have occurred anyway, in the absence of the chain of individualistic

[8] Marx's discussion of the stable, non-capitalist, "Asiatic" mode of production, in the *Grundrisse,* suggests that he did not regard it as inevitable that capitalism should have arisen on this planet. Indeed, the story of the rise of capitalism out of West European feudalism, in volume one of *Capital,* depends on several fortuitous coincidences, e.g., the occurrence of long-term inflation stimulated by gold from the New World soon after the Wars of the Roses had decimated the old English aristocracy and transferred dominance over the countryside to a new, more mercantile nobility.

episodes that actually caused it, even though there is a small but significant probability that this phenomenon might not have occurred under the conditions obtaining at the time. The crucial counterfactual condition is true, provided that only an extraordinary occurrence (such as did not take place in actuality) could have prevented the phenomenon at issue, in the circumstances obtaining at the time. But "extraordinary" does not mean "impossible." In using the crucial counterfactual in this way, I am conforming to the actual usage of social scientists, which conforms, in turn, to the ordinary usage of conditionals of the "*X* would have happened even if *Y* had not happened" variety.

The Nazi seizure of power was the result of many individualist episodes, including Hindenburg's inviting Hitler to become Chancellor, an invitation which reflected Hindenburg's illusion that Hitler could readily be discarded later on, in favor of a nationalist politician of a more traditionalist sort. Many historians believe that the Nazis would have come to power anyway, in the absence of these particular individualist episodes. On their view, a Nazi government was worth the real attendent risks, from the standpoint of the German Establishment, given the Nazis' unique ability, if installed in power, to repress domestic unrest while mobilizing for war. Had Hindenburg been less naive, he or his successor would have come to appreciate these facts, and would have installed a Nazi government anyway. Other historians regard the Nazi seizure of power as fortuitous in that they refuse to accept the claim that the seizure of power would have occurred in the absence of the causal chain including Hindenburg's naive assessment of Hitler.

Neither side in this dispute would regard the following consideration as showing that the "inevitabilist" side is wrong: "If Hindenburg had been more realistic, his anxieties would have prevented him from inviting Hitler to assume the Chancellorship as soon as he did, i.e., on January 30, 1933. As a result, Hitler, Goebbels, and Goering would have been crossing different street-corners under different circumstances, breathing different air, and drinking different fluids in February, 1933. There is a small probability they would have died, from accident, disease, or poison, as a result. This leadership vacuum could not have been filled. Hence, the Nazi seizure of power was not inevitable." This consideration is irrelevant, because the "inevitabilists" are only claiming that late-Weimar circumstances would have brought about the Nazi seizure of power in some way, if not through the individualist episodes which actually caused it, provided that nothing *extraordinary*, of a sort that never did occur, prevented the seizure of power. The coincidental death of the whole Nazi leadership in February 1933 would have been extraordinary, in the extreme.

In their dismissal of counterexamples depending on nonactual extraordinary possibilities, historians are faithful to ordinary usage of conditional of the form, "This would have happened anyway, if that had not brought it about." Suppose I say, in a *post mortem* of a bridge game, "Jones would have won, even if the finesse had not worked. He could have gotten to the board in the next round, and established his spades." I mean, then, that something extraordinary, for example, a lapse of memory remarkable in a player of Jones' experience and temperament, would have been required to prevent his carrying through the indicated winning strategy, which would have existed after the failed finesse. That is why I would not make this claim of a nervous beginner, in whom an incapacity to recover from the failed finesse would not be extraordinary.

I have used the vague phrase, "extra-ordinary," the applicability of which heavily depends on the purposes and standards assumed by participants in the discussions in which the phrase is employed. This vagueness and contextdependence fits the facts of social-scientists' uses of "*X* would have happened anyway, even if *Y* had not brought it about." Suppose a historian believes that in January 1933, the German Establishment was rapidly coming to the realization that a Nazi government was worth the real attendent risks. He also believes that the Nazi Party would have rapidly disintegrated into warring factions without Hitler's leadership. Should he agree with the inevitabilists, that Hindenburg's naivete only hastened the Nazi seizure of power? Or should he agree with the noninevitabilists, on the grounds that Hitler was more a prey to accidental death and assassination while out of office, and the Nazi seizure of power depended on his survival? While the coincidental death of the whole leadership of a major political party would be regarded as extraordinary in any dispute, it is not clear that the same can be said of the death of one leader. Without knowing the standards for the dismissal of hypotheses as too extraordinary which are shared by both sides, we do not know what side the historian should take. Perhaps there is no shared standard which dictates that he accept or reject the claim that the Nazis would have come to power, even in the absence of the chain of individualist episodes which brought them to power.

Fortunately, there are judgments as to what would be extraordinary on which all reasonable social scientists engaged in research and argument would agree. My subsequent uses of the necessity constraint will rely on such cases.

Counterfactuals of the form, "*X* would have happened even in the absence of the chain of individualistic episodes which brought it about" are too wordy to bear much further repetition. In what

follows, I shall often abbreviate them by such phrases as "*X* was bound to happen" or "*X* was guaranteed by the circumstances in which it occurred." These paraphrases are not simply proposed, *ad hoc,* for purposes of convenience. As actually used by social scientists, the respective phrases are equivalent. Reflection on previous and subsequent examples (for example, Lenin on World War I, the "inevitabilists" on the Nazi seizure of power) should make this clear. Again no special social-scientific usage is in question. My bridge *post mortem* might alternatively have been, "Even if the finesse had failed, Jones was bound to win."

I have emphasized respects in which the language of Proposition IV should be taken to conform to ordinary usage, though not to usages characteristic of many abstract discussions of necessity and contingency. In one crucial respect, though, the necessity constraint is more specific to social-scientific usage. It is a constraint on what counts as an explanation *in the social sciences,* not in all (in particular, all extra-scientific) contexts in which explanations are sought. It reflects the scientist's desire to reduce the extent to which reality seems the product of chance or, rather, to reduce this appearance to the greatest extent that the facts allow. We are not surprised by outbursts like the remark of the historian, E. H. Carr: "The shape of Cleopatra's nose, Bajazet's attack of gout, the monkey-bite that killed King Alexander, the death of Lenin—these were accidents which modified the course of history. . . . On the other hand, so far as they were accidental, they do not enter into any rational interpretation of history, or into the historian's hierarchy of significant causes" ([2], p. 135). Proposition IV is another expression—compared with Carr's a mild one—of this professional interest in reducing the realm of accident.

The scientist's interest in explanation is not, however, the only legitimate one. And when the pursuit of explanations is dominated by other interests, the necessity constraint may be inappropriate. Suppose that Simon tied Pauline to the railroad tracks, but, just before the 9:14 rolled by, Walter, equally villainous, saw Pauline and shot her in the head. At Walter's trial, the jury might properly accept the fact that Walter shot Pauline in the head as the explanation of why she died that day, even though she was bound to die that day, in any case. But juries are concerned to ascertain individual responsibility, that is, to locate people in individual causal chains of certain kinds leading up to individual events of certain kinds. They are not concerned to reveal the maximum extent to which necessity governs human affairs.

Here are two typical cases which would lead social scientists to acknowledge the general validity of the necessity constraint. In each

case it is at least plausible that this constraint is applicable. By this, I mean that the claim of relative necessity ("Under the social conditions obtaining at the time, *X* would have happened, even in the absence of the individual causes that actually produced it") is at least worthy of empirical investigation, in each case. Such plausibility is sufficient for showing that Proposition III cannot be used to defend the methodological validity of Proposition I.

The first example is presented in an essay of Weber's which deserves to be much more widely read, "The Logic of the Cultural Sciences," a discussion of the methodological views of the historian, Eduard Meyer. Weber writes

> Eduard Meyer himself very nearly applies this procedure [viz., reflection on which might have happened] to the two shots which in the Berlin March days directly provoked the outbreak of the street fighting. The question as to who fired them is, he says, 'historically irrelevant.' Why is it more irrelevant than the discussion of the decisions of Hannibal, Frederick the Great, and Bismarck? 'The situation was such that *any* accident whatever would have caused the conflict to break out' (!) Here we see Eduard Meyer himself answering the allegedly 'idle' question as to what 'would' have happened without these shots; thus their historical 'significance' (in this case, irrelevance) is decided. . . . The judgment that, if a single historical fact is conceived of as absent from or modified in a complex of historical conditions, it *would* condition a course of *historically* important respects, seems to be of considerable value for the determination of the historical significance of those facts. [Weber's emphasis. It is clear in context that 'seems to be of considerable value' is a piece of ironic understatement, on Weber's part.] ([16], pp. 165 f.)

The facts are these, as Meyer saw them: in March, 1848, an uprising broke out in the workers' quarter of Berlin. The immediate cause was the firing of two shots at a crowd, which provoked a wave of rumors. The political and social tensions in Berlin, in 1848, were so extreme and so deep-seated that had those two shots not rung out, some other incident would have occurred and triggered a workers' uprising.

Surely, Meyer's view of the facts is not obviously wrong. Given this assessment of the facts, Weber and Meyer are both agreed that the firing of the two shots would be "historically irrelevant." Why? Because given the assumed conditions, a workers' uprising in Berlin in 1848 was bound to occur, even in the absence of the sequence of actions, beliefs, and psychological dispositions (the shots and the

resultant rumors) that actually led up to it. Weber and Meyer both assume that the historian's question, "Why did X happen?" should be answered by a description of why X was bound to happen, if such a description is available. Implicitly, they both accept the necessity constraint.

Note that the acceptance of the necessity constraint in this case is obviously dependent on the interests characteristic of social science. In a trial for incitement to riot arising from the March 1848 uprising in Berlin, a jury might quite properly accept that rioting broke out because of speeches provoked by the two shots, refusing to acquit agitators on the grounds that an uprising would have occurred anyway. Note, too, that an extraordinary coincidence, for example, the absence of any provocative incident for week after week, despite the high level of discontent and the nervousness of the troops, might have forestalled an uprising, if the shots had not been fired. As we have seen, such hypothetical interventions of the extraordinary are irrelevant to historians' claims that something would have happened anyway, in the absence of the sequence of episodes that actually produced it.

A different example of social necessity will be helpful as bringing us closer to the case ultimately at issue, the tendency for businessmen to identify the interests of big business with the national interest. The change from carbon steel to stainless steel as the main material for knives would normally be explained as bound to happen, due to the greater capacity of stainless steel to keep its edge, together with the great reduction in the relative cost of stainless steel, as a result of technological advances in the 1920's. It is possible, in this case, to give a wholly individualistic description of the causes of the change, describing the episodes in which individual cutlery executives made actual decisions to switch production to stainless steel. But if this particular causal chain had not existed, stainless steel would still replace carbon steel as the main material for knives. Suppose that the executives in question had not formed beliefs to the effect that the material basis of knife-production should be changed. Other people would have been smart enough to perceive the implications of the technological advances and to use this perception either to drive those executives out of office or to drive their companies out of the market. That Mr. Jones formed the belief, "We ought to switch to stainless," on May 18, 1927, that Mr. Smith formed that belief on April 2, etc., does not explain why stainless steel was bound to replace carbon steel as the main basis of knife-production. For had they not formed those beliefs, the industrial capitalist system

of production would, as it were, spontaneously correct for their stupidity.

Here again, the social scientist's interest in explaining what is bound to happen is so great, that the individualist saga fails to provide a socialscientific explanation of why something happened. Economists would not regard the chronicle of executive decision as an explanation of why stainless steel has replaced carbon steel. And most would express their discontent by saying, "Even if these executives had been stupid, the structure of capitalist production, together with facts about cost and utility, would have guaranteed that stainless would win out, anyway."

I hope these examples make it plausible that the necessity constraint governs social science. Surely, they show that answering the question, "Why would this have happened anyway, even in the absence of the individual causes leading up to it?" is a characteristic and important explanatory goal in social science. The response to the original objection based on the individualist sage of encouragement and indoctrination is now complete if the following hypothesis can be made plausible (that is, worthy of empirical investigation): in a capitalist society, typical major capitalists, whoever they might be, would identify the interests of big business with the national interest, even in the absence of the actual beliefs and dispositions which have produced this belief in actual individual capitalists.

We can, I think, regard a description of the individualist causes of the identification of the bourgeois and the national interests in the same light as the description of the individualist causes of the preponderance of stainless steel knives. The individualist causes of the fact that a capitalist typically identifies the bourgeois interest and the national interest may include this father's saying this to his son, who will become a capitalist, this company president's congratulating the second vice-president for this speech, and so on. But if the father had not said anything like that (if he had been raising his son to be a communist), if the president had not said anything like that (if he had been on the verge of renouncing the presidency and joining a hippy commune), the schools, media, and less formal training processes of our society would, in a Marxist's view, insure that others who became capitalists generally identify the bourgeois and the national interests. Perhaps the changes on the level of individual action would require no change in the nature of the overall training process in order to maintain the belief-tendency. But if there is a need for such a change, it will be forthcoming, on the Marxist's view. Thus, to take a small example, when the Indochina War reduced

the number of students who identified the bourgeois and national interests and increased the number who contrasted them, businessmen launched a large-scale advertising campaign in student newspapers extolling the virtues of capitalism. On a larger scale, Marxists such as Althusser have argued that advanced capitalist nations have dealt with the increased disenchantment with capitalism in the course of the nineteenth century by developing a greatly elaborated ideological apparatus, centered on the public schools.

The explanation I have just sketched would still be compatible with the individualist constraint on explanation, if conditions which guarantee the belief-phenomenon in question themselves consisted of agents' reasons. But there is no basis, *a priori,* for the assumption that they take this individualist form. In particular, objective interests associated with social roles may provide the relevant "guarantee." Take the case of the ideological function of the mass media. Marxists (and others) claim that a managing editor of a major newspaper in a capitalist society will have an objective interest in encouraging beliefs which promote acquiescence to capitalism. Were he repeatedly to fail to do so, his desires and goals would be thwarted in that he would be fired, demoted, or otherwise removed from participation in decision-making which is important to him. But for these desires and goals to lead an editor to promote pro-bourgeois beliefs, they need not provide his reasons for so acting. He might honestly deny that he ever promotes political-economic attitudes out of a desire to keep his job and personal influence. In general, what guarantees the perpetuation of certain ideologies may be the association of certain objective interests with certain powers, an association which does not depend on the existence of any particular set of agents' reasons.

Many social scientists and philosophers regard Watkins-Weber individualism as too extreme, but accept some more moderate individualist constraint on explanation. They believe that every large-scale social phenomenon must have a rock-bottom explanation in terms of the psychological characteristics of individual participants. But they do not limit those psychological characteristics to participants' reasons for acting as they do. For example, the assumption is sometimes made that social phenomena are all explainable in terms of the beliefs, desires, and attitudes of actual or typical individuals regardless of whether those factors play the role of participants' reasons for action.[9]

[9] Explicit expressions of moderate individualism are often found among the "culture and personality" school in anthropology (see, for example, [1], p. 24) and in the writings of Alfred Schutz (e.g., [12], p. 335). Where he does not embrace the Weber-Watkins extreme, Peter Winch, in [18], seems to assert moderate individualism (see p. 45).

Moderate individualism appears to be trivial, in the special sense introduced at the beginning of this paper. The current theories violating Weber-Watkins individualism appeal, at rock-bottom, to the beliefs, desires and attitudes of typical occupants of social roles. Short of extremely arbitrary restrictions on the scope of "psychological characteristic," it does not seem that moderate individualism excludes any current explanatory hypotheses.

It is all the more surprising that our discussion of causation and explanation casts doubt on the methodological validity of moderate individualism, i.e., the legitimacy of its use as a regulative principle excluding hypotheses as unworthy of investigation. Presumably, the rationale for so using moderate individualism is a variant of the argument from Proposition III to Proposition I. The first clause of Proposition III, according to which social phenomena are caused by acts of individuals, is assumed to be valid. So is some broadened version of the second clause, asserting that those acts are due, in turn, to psychological characteristics of the individuals, defined in some broader-than-Weberian way. On this basis, the availability of an explanation in terms of those psychological characteristics is asserted.

It is hard to see what other methodological rationale there could be for moderate individualism, aside from invalid variants of Watkins' invalid arguments for his position. But if I have correctly identified the basis of moderate individualism, it is doubly untenable. In the first place, there is no reason to be moderately individualist (i.e., to adopt the moderate position as a regulative principle), while stopping short of Watkins-Weber individualism. The argument from causation to explanation sketched in the last paragraph only works if the inference of Proposition I from Proposition III is sound. And the premise of the moderate argument is no more obviously true than Proposition III. Large-scale social phenomena surely are produced by acts which are due to beliefs and motives at the time of action which are the respective agents' reasons for action. Moderate and extreme individualism are equally justifiable as regulative devices.

In any case, our discussion suggests that moderate individualism, plausible as it sounds, lacks an *a priori* justification. Social phenomena are brought about by acts which are the result, in turn, of the psychological characteristics of the agents. But a description of those characteristics need not explain the social phenomenon in question.

Perhaps the grain of truth in moderate individualism is this: As new kinds of sociological explanations are accepted, the scope of "psychological characteristic" is broadened to include factors necessary to explain any new social tendencies asserted in terms of agents'

psychological characteristics. Thus, Marxists often seem to treat being bourgeois as a psychological characteristic. Durkheimians might be held to treat anomie in the same fashion. But even if this speculation is right, individualism, moderate or extreme, appears to furnish no valid *constraint* on explanation. If the scope of "psychological characteristic" is defined in advance of empirical research, a requirement of rock-bottom explanations in terms of such characteristics ought not to regulate such research, ruling out hypotheses as unworthy of investigation.

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