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**Methodological Individualism**

**Introduction and Founding Texts**

**Chapter 1.** The turmoiled emergence of methodological individualism within the social sciences landscape: a path to its understanding.

The introduction explains the significance of the “battle of methods” that pitted the founders of methodological individualism (MI) against various forms of historicism that dominated the nineteenth century and fed the extremisms of the twentieth century. The proponents of MI opposed the use of abstract social constructs to account for the influence of social factors on individual actions through the same types of causes as in the natural sciences.

Conversely, they emphasized the importance of understanding the situational features that underlie individuals' reasons for acting and of analyzing the effects, especially the unintended ones, that result from the combination of their actions.

In addition, this introduction accounts for the development of the individualist method through references to its founding texts, especially those proposed in the next four chapters of the book, and explains the relationships among their authors. An examination of the historical rise of MI and the arguments of its founders and proponents reveals its purely methodological focus, devoid of any moral or political bias, its non-reductionist epistemological stance, and its intrinsic ties to the "understanding" sociology.

**Chapter 2.** Carl Menger (1883). On the theoretical understanding of social phenomena that are neither the products of convention nor of positive legislation, but the unintended results of historical development.

This second chapter presents a new translation of one of the most important chapters of *Investigations into the Method of the Social Sciences with Special Reference to Economics* written by the founder of the Austrian School of Economics, Carl Menger. It deals with the question of analytical decomposition of social wholes into basic units. This decomposition makes it possible to model social phenomena theoretically and to explain how complex phenomena arise from the "coworking of the factors responsible for its origin". Menger illustrates these ideas by explaining the emergence of social institutions (especially money, but also localities and states) as unintended effects of historical development involving the aspirations of individuals and their interactions. For example, he shows how, in barter-based economies, individuals gradually begin to accept goods that are not useful to them as such in exchange for the goods they bring to the market, because these goods have the best qualities for exchange: These are the ancestors of money.

**Chapter 3.** Joseph Schumpeter (1908). Methodological individualism and the emergence of the marginalist school of economics.

This third chapter consists of two texts taken from Joseph Schumpeter's first book, *The Nature and Essence of Economic Theory*, which established his reputation as an economist but was only translated into English for the first time in 2010. In these texts, Schumpeter attempts to provide a general and relevant picture of the field of theoretical economics as it developed in the context of the German Historical School's opposition to the "new system" in economics (the Marginalist School). In particular, Schumpeter explains that these approaches are both inheritors of the classical system. In his chapter on MI, where he formalizes the term and associates the approach with the contributions of the marginalist school of economics (of which Menger is the founder on the Austrian side), he clarifies the crucial distinction between methodological individualism and political or moral individualism.

**Chapter 4.** Georg Simmel (1892-1907). The intrinsic conditions of historical knowledge and the mental nature of history.

This fourth chapter, consisting of excerpts from Georg Simmel's *Problems of the Philosophy of History*, illuminates the organic links between "understanding" sociology and methodological individualism. In this epistemological essay, Simmel develops a neo-Kantian theory of knowledge that challenges the idea that objectivity implies independence from the knowing mind. He argues that all phenomena of historical interest are the products of mental processes, and that the historian must abstractly account for the meaningful development of mental contents that underlie particular historical actions, apprehended in their historical logic, not in the manner of a psychologist, but through a capacity for understanding that he shares with the historical actor. From this perspective, the historian, or more generally the social scientist, must highlight the relevant elements of the actors' situations, including knowledge forms or structures, and introduce interpretive assumptions that supplement facts, with the aim of clarifying the subjective unity of meaning that drives the social action.

**Chapter 5.**  Max Weber (1922). The basic concepts of sociology.

This fifth and final chapter presents an original translation of the methodologically most important chapter of Weber's seminal work for the social sciences, *Economy and Society*. In this chapter, Weber integrates the contributions of Menger and Simmel, but avoids the formalist inspiration of the economist's methodological expositions on the one hand, and the philosopher's emphasis on understanding the mental states of historical actors on the other. Weber highlights the intrinsic connection between the decomposition of social wholes into basic units, implied by the individualist method, and the understanding approach. In this way, he explains the proximity of the methods of the natural and social sciences and the specificity of the relationship of social scientists to their object. The latter can mentally grasp what motivates people's actions, whereas natural scientists essentially formulate theoretical hypotheses on the basis of empirical data. Weber thus conceptualizes the specificity of causality in the social sciences by referring it to the reasons that subjectively drive the actions of social actors.