

Dialectical Materialist Methodologies: Purposes, Procedures and Approaches to Empirical Research

What is the purpose of dialectical materialist methodologies? A preliminary answer to this question is summarized by Zanetti (2003), paraphrasing Herbert Marcuse: the overall purpose of dialectical thought is to break down the self-assurance and self-contentment of common sense, to undermine the sinister confidence in the power and language [of the dominant class]. This is an aspiration based on the realization of the inherently contradictory, material *and* relational nature of reality, responding to which dialectical materialist philosophy offers methodologies for treating complexity and perpetual change. Speaking to each of these elements, Ollman offers further clarification:

No one will deny, of course, that everything in society is related in some way and that the whole of this is changing, again in some way and at some pace. Yet, most people try to make sense of what is going on by viewing one part of society at a time, isolating and separating it from the rest, and treating it as static. [...] As a result, looking for these connections and their history becomes much more difficult than it has to be. They are left for last or left out completely, and important aspects of them are missed, distorted, or

level of generality and contradiction; matters I will

As a principle the syllogism connects three moments: universality (*U*

In this regard, I argue that Adorno's negative dialectics serves a special function. This function is based on his argument for the inherent relationship between empirical social sciences and dialectical materialism which he takes pains to draw out. As Adorno writes (of himself) in the preface to *Negative Dialectics* (1973), "I have tried to draw out the relationship between the empirical social sciences and dialectical materialism" (p.xx). It is equally important to note however that in this work (written originally in 1954 on the heels of the emergence into public consciousness of the Holocaust) Adorno was likewise motivated by the concern to understand the persistent failures of societies as much, if not more so, than he was interested to understand the tendencies toward positive dialectics. The two motives converged. Out of this convergence appeared his desire to take more seriously than virtually any previous dialectician, including Hegel and Marx, the empirical *minutiae of the particular*, the heterogeneous and the variant as definitive dimensions of both positive and negative change.

Adorno's negative dialectics is a reconsideration of the relevance of the principle of non-identity (the irreducibility of things to our identifications of them) which he draws on in constructive criticism of tendencies toward positive dialectics, i.e., the tendency of Hegel to assert against his own apparatus the predominance of a positive synthesis (a negation of a negation leading to a positive transformation). While Adorno admits the dynamics of identification and positive synthesis as features of our worlds—whether it is within the most fundamental process of thought, or as within the very fabric of capitalist work, economy and society [i.e. capitalist value defined by the process of making equivalence (exchange-value) out of what is always unique, non-identical and singular (use-value)]—he nevertheless singles out the {non-identity} as he phrases it, as a central point of departure.

Building on this privileging of a much more radical analysis of the particular, Adorno's negative dialectics serves a special function. This function is based on his argument for the inherent relationship between empirical social sciences and dialectical materialism which he takes pains to draw out. As Adorno writes (of himself) in the preface to *Negative Dialectics* (1973), "I have tried to draw out the relationship between the empirical social sciences and dialectical materialism" (p.xx). It is equally important to note however that in this work (written originally in 1954 on the heels of the emergence into public consciousness of the Holocaust) Adorno was likewise motivated by the concern to understand the persistent failures of societies as much, if not more so, than he was interested to understand the tendencies toward positive dialectics. The two motives converged. Out of this convergence appeared his desire to take more seriously than virtually any previous dialectician, including Hegel and Marx, the empirical *minutiae of the particular*, the heterogeneous and the variant as definitive dimensions of both positive and negative change.

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contradictions, generate new cultural artefacts, and create new forms of life and the self.

Even as it admits that such a unit is an essential aspect of analysis. The claim here is that researchers must grapple mightily with, as Adorno put it, the dialectical structure (p.174). And thus, I argue it is through this type of negative dialectical sensitivity that we permit ourselves to appreciate the meaning of concern for the rather the import of heterogeneity, difference, variation and particularity that ultimately informs claims regarding not what must or should take place but the complexity of what does.

In the sometimes vexing phrasings and slippery terminologies of dialectics, I argue, we may yet discover combinations that can unlock analyses that resist less subtle means. Understanding them is worth the challenges they impose. Indeed, the concept of mind-in-activity necessarily

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