

Notes for Social Theory – February 2, 2006

CST Pgs 103 – 127

Recorded by Robert Brown with LDB

- I Spoke about the test.
- A. People were mostly concerned about technology problems and time limit
 - B. Be sure to recognize the difference between real structural constraints (the time limit) and the many things you can control (the order in which you answer questions, how much time you spend on each section, etc.).

II. Durkheim vs. Marx – subjective experience

Marx

critical
argues with analogies, rather than examples
technical
engaged / political
metaphorical
more abstract
polemic
philosophical

Durkheim

personal
examples, experience of
everyday life
academic / disciplinary
open-minded
concrete
deals with exceptions /
counter examples
sociological
apolitical

Marx lists counter arguments, attributes to bourgeois objections (pg 87-89). This is part of his critical stance; he has a specific audience he is trying to address / persuade, and a specific audience he sees as a political and intellectual adversary. Durkheim does not have a class-specific audience. He is easier to read without questioning it because he seems “even-handed” rather than critical. There are also many respects in which Durkheim is much more “intuitive” and less challenging to our commonsense than Marx - think about those as you read, and we can talk about them in class.

What is the big idea about the Durkheim section?

- What a thing is
- Social fact
- reciprocity of social forces / agents
- scientific method

The big idea is that there is a link between theory and methods. Establish ground to engage in sociological research.

Sandra Harding – 3 elements embedded how we do research

1. Epistemology (can be objectivist, subjectivism, standpoint) theory about knowledge. How we know what we know.
 - a. subjectivism – to know from within
 - b. objectivism- treating fact as a thing
 - c. **standpoint -knowledge comes from social location**
2. Method – technique for gathering and analyzing info
3. Methodology – choose how to use methods and techniques. Tells how to get from epistemology (rules about truth) to methods (way of gathering and analyzing data).

III. Durkheim's three main points in *Rules of Sociological Method*

- a. define domain sociology = the social
- b. methodology of sociology = objectivism
- c. logic of argument analysis

III. Social Fact

- A. The fact part is something that exists outside individual perceptions. Invested with coercive power. The only way to understand the fact is to treat them as things.
- B. Definition on page 117 in CST: “A social fact is any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint; which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations.”
- C. look for examples of social facts when reading Durkheim
- D. Social facts have the same quality of reality (for Durkheim) as physical facts. Among other things, you can't change them just by thinking about them; also, you can't understand social facts through contemplation or introspection.
- E. can only explain social facts (which are *sui generis* = a class of things in themselves) with other social facts
- F. Examples of social facts:
 1. social mores
 2. traditions
 3. pg 112 – law, morality, standards, religious dogma
 4. social currents

IV. Social institutions – to understand the social world you have to get outside your “skin” and out of your own experiences.

Durkheim's point – we can be as scientific about the social world as we are with, say, philosophy or psychology.

V. Thing – an object of knowledge, which is not penetrable by understanding (pg 109). You can't change it by thinking about it. They are real.

Empiricism – attitude of mind

Social realist – things in social world are real

Sui Generis – latin for “of its own gender/genus or unique in characteristics.”

while reading for next time, think about ID concepts and logic of argument and causality.