Notes for Social Theory—February 7, 2006
CST Pages 103-127
Recorded by Joe Hummel

I. Students took a total of 20 minutes to write informal position and rebuttals statements on the question, “Is Durkheim a methodological Marxist?” Dr. Brush instructed us to first come up with criteria for methodological Marxism and then to write up our arguments as to why Durkheim does or does not theorize a characteristically Marxist methodology. We traded papers in order to rebut arguments from the “other side.”

II. Class Discussion:

A. Criteria for methodological Marxism
   i. Specificity
      1. Specific Audience (Proletariat)
      2. Specific Unit of Analysis (Classes)
      3. Specific Goal (revolution)
   ii. Historicism
   iii. Critical
   iv. Problem-solution logic
   v. Dialectical
      1. Focus on contradictions
      2. Invoke thesis-antithesis-synthesis
   vi. Materialist
   vii. Holism/Systemic
   viii. Subjective/standpoint epistemology
   ix. Structuralist - describe and explain social order and social change with reference to the logic of institutions and their interconnections. For example, a structuralist might argue that societies are systems of institutions of kinship, labor, and sexuality/affect.

Dr. Brush emphasized that a key principle of comparison is to set out clear criteria for the theorists/theories being compared.

B. Arguments for why Durkheim is methodologically Marxist
   i. Relationship between state and civil society (reference to bottom of page 116)
      1. Tradition
      2. History
      3. Society predates our individual lives, so we cannot reduce the social to our individual lives
4. Structural/Systemic
5. Collectivity
ii. Holistic
iii. Materialist
   1. Social facts are things (reference to page 109)
   2. This is being objectivist in a materialist sense
iv. Anti-Individualist

Durkheim says that we cannot take a psychological approach to answer a social question, i.e. we can’t explain something macro with something micro. Dr. Brush explained this is the idea of the *sui generis*.

C. Arguments for why Durkheim is not methodologically Marxist
   i. Durkheim talks about inheritance, not development.
      1. Reference to page 110: social classes our handed down to us.
      2. This is contrary to Marx, who says we make our own history, although we are constrained.
   ii. Durkheim is objectivist
      1. He argues that social facts are things.
   iii. Durkheim’s intended audience is academic.
   iv. Durkheim’s intended audience and argument are generic
      1. Marx’s intended audience was specifically to the proletariat, and his specific argument was that they need to revolt.
   v. Durkheim is less of a “position-taker”, while Marx clearly sided with the proletariat.
   vi. Durkheim’s goal is only to persuade the audience of the disciplinary legitimacy of sociology.
   vii. Durkheim is more concerned with individual agency
   viii. Durkheim is not very critical.
   ix. Durkheim is looking for integrations, while Marx is looking for contradictions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodological comparison</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marx</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical materialist with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>functionalist moments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dialectic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolutionary and revolutionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III. Dr. Brush passed out a concept sheet for Durkheim
IV. Types of Explanation

Types of explanation by discipline (from Jon Elster):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disciplines</th>
<th>Causal and mechanistic</th>
<th>Causal and functional</th>
<th>Causal and intentional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>paradigmatic</td>
<td>Not usually</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>paradigmatic</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social science</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>problematic</td>
<td>paradigmatic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Elster, no general theory equivalent to biological evolution applies to human behavior, because humans can do things that biological organisms cannot: strategies of waiting, one step back-two steps forward, other oblique moves.