

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-anthithesis-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*.

Methodological comparison

| Marx | Durkheim |
|---|---|
| Historical materialist with functionalist moments | Positivist, functionalist, social realist |
| dialectic | holistic |
| Evolutionary and revolutionary | Evolutionary and organic |
| structural | Structural and organic |

III. Dr. Brush passed out a concept sheet for Durkheim

IV. Types of Explanation

Types of explanation by discipline (from Jon Elster):

| | Causal and mechanistic | Causal and functional | Causal and intentional |
|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Physics | paradigmatic | Not usually | No |
| Biology | Yes | paradigmatic | No |
| Social science | yes | problematic | paradigmatic |

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.