

Nongovernmentality

Arch 603/Slavic 471

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A REDUCTIVE BUT PERHAPS ALSO USEFUL TAXONOMY OF CRITIQUE

Citations from Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1972),

"Traditional" Theory

1. Empirical: self-constituting subject investigates "facts" that have "objective" reality
2. Abstract: categories are generic, universal, transhistorical
3. Discipline-specific: made for and operates within isolated social spheres (disciplines)
4. Disciplines make up harmonious whole (society)
5. Instrumental: intended to perform tasks (explain, interpret, analyze)
6. Legitimizing: renders society natural and good in its current form (status quo)

Critical Theory

1. Social constructivist (subject/object shape one another)
"But in so far as the objective realities given in perception are conceived as products which in principle should be under human control and, in the future at least, will in fact come under it, these realities lose the character of pure factuality," p. 209.
2. Concrete particulars
"(The object of critical theory is) a definite individual in his (sic) real relation to other individuals and groups, in his (sic) conflict with a particular class, and, finally in the resultant web of relationships with the social totality and with nature," p. 211
3. Concerned with "totality"
"Critical activity ... has society itself for its object," p. 206
4. Totality structured by contradictions (primarily between reason and capital)
"If activity governed by reason is proper to man, then existent social practice, which forms the individual's life down to its least details, is inhuman, and this inhumanity affects everything that goes on in the society," p. 210.
5. "Useless" in the status quo
"(Critical theory) is suspicious of the very categories of better, useful, appropriate, productive, and valuable, as these are understood in the present order, and refuses to take them as nonscientific presuppositions about which one can do nothing," p. 207
6. Transformative
"Unless there is continued theoretical effort... to shed critical light on present day society ... the ground is taken from under the hope of radically improving human existence," p. 233