Critical Theory

Origins and Impact

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Social Justice / Identity Politics

Radical striving for equity/human rights - a caricature

(moderate acceptance is mainstream)

- Pattern:

    1. Chose a social group which is in some way disadvantaged

    2. Blame those not in the group for oppression and champion those disadvantaged as oppressed victims

    3. Do not investigate the causes, do not tolerate investigation or discussion (cancel culture)

    4. Systematically transform meanings to confirm the diagnosis

    5. Reverse the alleged oppression by policies which create real oppression

- Some such groups:

    - Working Class, Colonies, Black/BAME, Women, Gay, Trans, Fat, Disabled

Three Pillars of Identity Politics

Where it came from and how it got here

- Critical Theory - an adaptation of Marxism

    - Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas

- Postmodern Philosophy - radical scepticism on the left

    - Baudrillard, Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault

- The Long March through the Institutions - an effective subversive strategy

    - Gramski, Dutchke

Some Elements of Critical Theory

in the beginning…

1. Critical Theory set in opposition to Classical Theory (Descartes, Enlightenment, Positivism)

   - Integration of:
     - ✳ philosophy, social sciences, social/political activism
     - ✳ theoretical, practical and normative
   - Contrasted with distinction between:
     - ✳ Objective rational and empirical knowledge (*what*)
     - ✳ Practical knowledge of *how*
     - ✳ Possibly subjective *values* and *ethical norms* (good v. bad)

2. Critique to realise "emancipation" from multiple oppressions

3. Pervasive democratisation: "all conditions of social life that are controllable by human beings depend on real consensus" in a rational society (Horkheimer).
   (Contrast liberal mixed economy in which most of the economy is free-market)

4. Later: intolerance of dissent (Marcuse)

Critical theory

◉ a *social theory* oriented toward *critiquing* and *changing society* as a whole,

- in contrast with

◉ *traditional theory* oriented only to *understanding or explaining* it

◉ seeks "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them." (Emancipate from slavery)

◉ Hypersensitised notions of oppression - "silence is violence"

◉ Judgement by social groups rather than individual merits (often immutable characteristics)

◉ Penalise or compensate according to group membership

◉ Penalise or compensate for actions of previous generations

The postmodern trajectory

- Postmodern - Jean Baudrillard, Giles Deluge, Felix Guattari

- Post-structural & Deconstructional

  - Lyotard: Anti "Meta-narrative" pro "mini-narrative"

  - Derrida: Sceptical about meaning, except binaries (invert to redress)

  - Foucault: "power-knowledge" ("episteme") as cultural construct.

- Postcolonial

  - Said, (Spivak, Bhabba): west constructed east as its inferior (reconstruct)

- Critical Legal Studies, Critical Race Theory, Gender, Sex, Sexuality, Queer Theory

  - Kimberlé Crenshaw: intersectionality

- White priviledge, complicity, fragility

  - Macintosh, Applebaum, DiAngelo

The Post-Marxist Perspective
social transformation by seeding discontent

- Marxist people's revolution failed because worker's lot improved, they were too content

- Alternative strategy Part1

  - Systematically search for all possible kinds of disadvantage

  - Maximise each and represent them as wilful oppression

  - Invent doctrine ("intersectionality") to link all the victims

  - Constantly look for instances and blow them up (exaggerate)

- Alternative strategy Part2

  - The Long March through the institutions (elaborating and spreading 1)