

Social Theory Notes

Recorded by Kelli Beilharz (04/18) with some additions by Dr. Brush

We briefly discussed the theorists from the Frankfurt school including Horkheimer and Adorno. These readings were excluded (Be sure to thank Dr. Brush). The critical theorists analyzed the present society in relation to the past. They wanted to produce knowledge in order to understand oppression and the world.

Adorno and Horkheimer described their mission this way: "We had set ourselves nothing less than the discovery of why mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism" (1944).

We also started out clearing up the concept of ideology. It had gained a negative connotation and had a specific application to politics. Mannheim spoke about ideology in his opening sentence (p.293) and confronted the association that the term had with Marx. Mannheim makes the distinction in explaining that people think of Marx as ideology but should be thought of as utopia. Which is which depends on politics, and (Mannheim claims at the end of the excerpt we read) is only identifiable in retrospect. "Ideologies" later became known as false political ideas.

Domhoff defines ideology this way: "An ideology is the complex set of rationales and rationalizations through which a group, class, or nation interprets the world and justifies its actions within it."

Mannheim- His method: empirical reality. He was committed to science rather than philosophy. He was an empiricist, NOT a positivist.

Durkheim had a positivist view in that you have to study the social world the same way you would study the natural world, treating facts as things.

Others think that these two worlds (social & **natural**) are very different

We can then see Weberian thought (interpreting and understanding facts) in **Mannheim**. Weber was a historicist in that there was no truth outside of time. Knowledge has roots in historical settings.

Sociology of knowledge is the careful study of the social sources of "distorted thinking". Distortions do not necessarily come from conscious intentions of the ruling class to "fool" the working class. Rather, distortions are more likely to occur simply because ideas emerge from specific sectors of the social world and are therefore inherently limited, one-sided, and distorted. There is always a relationship between existence and knowledge, but the precise nature of that relationship varies and can be determined only by empirical study.

A comparison of Mannheim and Durkheim:

Durkheim states that you have to have a notion of time, **space, number, type, etc.**

Ideas are constructed out of social elements but are not purely subjective.

Mannheim states ideologies aren't always conscious and don't come exclusively from class.

The Critical Theorists and contradiction:

Critical theorists want to claim soc. of knowledge is a tool for understanding and requires science BUT at same time also claim that soc. of knowledge can prevent political agenda spiraling out of control. (science **can "reveal" truth** v. science is political)

Another Weberian moment in Mannheim...

Weber, rationality and irrationality

- substantial rationality = "an act of thought which reveals intelligent insight into the events in a given situation"
- substantial irrationality = "everything else which either is false or not an act of thought at all (as for example drives, impulses, wishes, and feelings, both conscious and unconscious)."
- functional rationality = ends-means calculation (similar to Weber on formal rationality)
- functional irrationality = "everything which breaks through and disrupts functional ordering".

Functional and substantive rationality may conflict - a soldier acts in accord with functional rationality without thinking through the action or order in a substantively rational way. The irrational consequence of the spread of functional rationality is decline of substantive rationality - the more rationalized (and bureaucratic, in Weber's sense) the social world becomes, the less people get/have to think about what they are doing. Mannheim sees both irrationality and rationality as built into the structure of modern society.

1. Substantial rationality- active thought to produce insight

2. Substantial irrationality- false or not active thought/intelligence (ie. Wishes/desires).

3. Functional rationality- formal Weberian rationality (ends mean conclusion)

4. Functional irrationality- disrupts functional ordering

*Conflict between 1 and 3!

*3.- ironic consequence is decline in opportunity to exercise your intelligence.

Example of the conflict above between 1 and 3- Pg. 337: When we have a capitalist system that determines what we think of as needs, getting what we need undermines our

ability to think for ourselves. In other words, false needs are over satisfied where other needs are not met and an unhappy consciousness prevails.

We get stuck in a cage to create goods/efficiency, and our opportunity to practice substantial rationality disappears. We have nothing to exercise our independent thought and therefore cannot grow.

lim·i·nal

Pronunciation: 'lim-&n-^əl

Function: *adjective*

1 : of or relating to a sensory threshold <*liminal* research>

2 : situated at a sensory threshold : barely perceptible <observation of *liminal* hues is beset with difficulties —Elsie Murray>

sub·li·mate (süb'li-māt')

v. sub·li·mat·ed, sub·li·mat·ing, sub·li·mates

1. To transform directly from the solid to the gaseous state or from the gaseous to the solid state without becoming a liquid.
2. To modify the natural expression of an instinctual impulse, especially a sexual one, in a socially acceptable manner.

Sublimation- modifying natural expression of instinctual impulse into acceptable behavior.

Desublimation- expressing the impulse; not turning it into something productive.

Repressive desublimation- repressing the impulse to express

Example given in classic literature v. contemporary (p. 336).

If you fulfill your libidinal desires- you need punishment, eros = thanatos.

Still on pg. 336, "fulfillment is destruction"

Great example: We have 50 types of detergent to meet our needs. How can you complain about life if you have 50 types of detergent to choose from. The illusion that we have a choice in having our needs met.

What is going to break up the system is for you to want something.

Sublimation preserves the need or liberation.

When we don't get what we want, we remember our needs.

Adjusted desublimation erases your real needs because your false needs have been met.

It obliterates renunciation **and the memory of renunciation, and therefore the drive to fight the system.**

This produces a one dimensional man.