Horkheimer on Technology and Humanity

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Abstract: What is the view of Horkheimer on technology and humanity? This paper tries to explain the merit and demerit views of Horkheimer on technology and humanity. If we focus on the view of Horkheimer, we can see that the multidiscipline of political economy, social psychology, history and philosophy are all integrated together. Horkheimer's aim is to save modern mankind (society) from technological domination. He was the first person to talk about "irrational organization" of society in Frankfurt School. He criticized modern rationality as domination in humanity. Modern rationality dominates society by technology whereby technology is used as an instrument to dominate humanity. Technology is directly related to power in modern mankind. Horkheimer criticized the principles of modern philosophers (rationalism, empiricism and positivism) because their theories were related to domination on humanity and nature by technology. Horkheimer's experience belonged to the World War II period. Namely how technology created atom bombs to kill thousands of people. Also, capitalists possessed technology in enslaving humans' minds. Technology, in Horkheimer's view is that it enslaved humanity (society) due to modern rationality. His criticism is pessimism on technology but it is also awareness for us. Although his criticism is important on technology and modern humanity (society), technology is still considered as part of our history and it is our experience in society. Technology is related to subjectivity and objectivity. It is also an instrument that can be integrated inside humans. Technology belongs to humans because humans themselves create it. We cannot stand outside of our creation but we can only say that humans misuse technology in society. We should try to understand the uses of our inventions. But, we cannot reject technology totally though. Technology has several kinds of forms during history. Technology gives meaning to our life and society.

Keywords: Horkheimer, Technology, Humanity, Critical Theory

Introduction

Horkheimer states that natural science and modernist rationality epistemology cannot solve the problem of humanity. But the problem of our society begins from modernist rationality.

When we read Dialectic of Enlightenment, it is a powerful manifesto that fights against modernist barbarian society. It asks us, "Why mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism"? He shows that our problem is in our perspective about this world. We cannot have self-realization based only on principles of natural science and technology. If we know humanity, it will help us to combine the roots of philosophy, society and history together.

1 See M. Horkheimer and T.W. Adorno’s Dialectic of Enlightenment, p.xi