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HAYES AND CRITICAL THEORY – A BRIEF REJOINDER FROM JAMES PAGE

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Abstract

James Page raises three objections to the suggestion from Mark Hayes that critical theory might serve as a theoretical basis for peace research: 1) the outmoded and questionable nature of critical theory, 2) the element of domination in the operation of critical theory, and 3) the relativism implicit within critical theory.

Response

The recent article by Mark Hayes 'Critical Theory and Peace Research' is certainly a useful attempt at a theoretical understanding of peace and peace research.¹ Certainly much of the writing on peace and peace research in Australia tends to lack any real theoretical understanding. Currently the legitimacy of peace research is still an area of some debate in Australia, and thus the theoretical foundations for this area of scientific endeavour are quite important.

However, it is equally important that the theoretical foundations of peace research be sound, and in this regard the reliance the writer places upon critical theory does seem problematical at least.

At the outset there are those who would argue that critical theory or criticalism (as the German *Kritizismus* is perhaps more correctly translated) is really a long-outmoded and certainly questionable philosophical tradition in any case.² It is notable that most of the actual critical theory cited by the writer dates from the sixties. It is true that critical theory has continued to attract attention in English and American scholarship in the seventies and eighties, although it does seem reasonable to suggest that much of this comes from the mystique attached to German philosophy. German philosophy itself has since progressed.

Secondly it does seem that one might question quite validly whether a theoretical foundation for peace research needs to be located on this specific German philosophical tradition. The irony in this whole situation is that the unquestioning allegiance given to this tradition of German philosophy is itself an indication of precisely the domination which peace research seeks to critique. Mark Hayes is perfectly correct in concluding his essay by suggesting that domination evidences itself in the global arms race.³ However, domination also evidences itself within science, and the suggested reliance upon critical theory is one indication of this.

Thirdly it does seem that one must have doubts about the implications of critical theory for peace research, especially with what has been identified as the relativism of this philosophical traditional.⁴ A crucial element within critical theory does seem to be the Hegelian and Feuerbachian assumptions on the nature of knowledge, and specifically on the epiphenomenality of religious truth. This relativism is quite prevalent today, and indeed, helps explain the somewhat machiavellian morality of both the nuclearism and survivalism of our time.

Possibly where we do need to turn in peace research is away from notions of domination towards notions of the future.⁵ It does seem that hope is and should be the *sine qua non* of all peace research, and indeed, of all science itself. This I think offers more positive prospects of a theoretical grounding for peace research.

References

- (1) Hayes, M.D. 'Critical Theory and Peace Research', *Social Alternatives*, Vol. 5, No. 1, November, 1985. pp. 47-53.
- (2) Pannenberg, W. *Wissenschaftstheorie and Theologie*, Frankfurt Suhrkamp, 1973; and elsewhere.
- (3) Hayes, Op. Cit., p. 52.
- (4) Adorno, Th., Albert, H., Dahrendorf, R., Habermas, J., Pilot, H. and Popper, K. *Der Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie*, Neuwied: Luchterhand 1969; and elsewhere.
- (5) Of course, this itself is an area which has engendered a range of scientific literatures in recent years, both philosophical and theological.