The 'Society of Spectacle' Concept and its Conceptual Correlates

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to show the philosophical content of the 'society of spectacle' concept, which was elaborated by a French thinker from the second part of the 20th century, Guy Debord. The study achieves this aim by means of the history of philosophy, analyzing this concept in the context of previous and contemporary philosophical ideas. Analysis, the structural method, the hermeneutic method of interpretation, and the comparative method are prime research methods. The philosophical part of Guy Debord's legacy is underexplored, so the dissertation helps to make significant progress in its exploration, because it sheds light on the key concepts of this theoretician.

The topic is divided into three themes discussed in the corresponding chapters. In the first chapter the research discusses the literature on the 'society of spectacle' and the proper methodology for exploring the philosophical content of this concept. In the next chapter the research covers the ontological basis of this concept in the framework of the history of philosophy, and in the third chapter the study focuses on the historical and philosophical research of the portion of the content of the concept which expresses Debord's social and political philosophy.

The dissertation argues that the 'society of spectacle' concept is rooted in Guy Debord's ideas about discrete space and the specific ontological status of 'image' as a substitute for reality. Thoughts in the area of ontology distinguish Guy Debord's concept from similar ideas of other authors; for instance, from Roland Barthes' theories. On the contrary, the ontological basis of the 'society of spectacle' places this concept in close quarters with Jean Baudrillard and Jacques Derrida's ideas about space and reality. The dissertation particularly argues for the conceptual proximity of G. Debord's notion of 'image' with Jean Baudrillard's notion of 'simulacrum', and also of G. Debord's notion of 'creating of images' with Jacques Derrida's notion of 'deconstruction.' The study then argues that G. Debord's 'society of spectacle' concept is a more radical interpretation of the irrationality of social behavior than similar concepts of thinkers such as Karl Marx, Herbert Marcuse, and Paul-Michel Foucault. Moreover, the analysis shows that G. Debord's 'society of spectacle' concept is a result of a long development of philosophical ideas which compare world, society or cognitive processes with spectacle throughout all main periods of the history of Western philosophy, primarily its modern period.

In contemporary research literature on G. Debord's theoretical legacy, the dissertation primarily contributes the new idea that Debord's thoughts have an ontological basis that opens new vistas for further researching their content and explaining their influence on contemporary culture.

Subjects/Keywords: Society of spectacle; Guy Debord; Philosophy, History of Philosophy; Philosophy of the 20th Century; Image; Spectacle.

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