

I have typically argued that critical reflection includes critical interpretation as well as critical validation. But what exactly does critical interpretation include?

Critical interpretation includes both what is ordinarily meant by historical and hermeneutical reflection, on the one hand, and what, on a strictly analytic view of philosophy, is properly meant by philosophical reflection, on the other. Both forms of reflection are concerned with understanding the individual expressions of meaning that make up life-praxis mediated by culture. The main difference between them is that historical and hermeneutical reflection is concerned with understanding the individual expressions as such, whereas philosophical reflection, being concerned, above all, with understanding *kinds* of meaning, concerns itself with understanding the individual expressions as instances of such kinds. In the case of each form of reflection, however, critical interpretation includes a certain kind of criticism—the kind I speak of as “*immanent* criticism” (which is what I mean by “*die Sachkritik*”!), as distinct from the *transcendent* criticism that properly belongs to, or is identical with, critical validation. In the case of historical and hermeneutical reflection, such immanent criticism consists in criticizing individual expressions of meaning by reference to the meaning they more or less adequately express. In the case of philosophical reflection, by contrast, individual expressions of meaning are immanently criticized by reference to the kind(s) of meaning of which they are more or less adequate expressions.

Another way of explaining the same difference is to distinguish with Habermas between “the surface level of meaning” and “the very rules that inform the production of utterances or that inform linguistic interaction”—and, correspondingly, between “the explication of meaning,” which is directed to “the semantic content of the symbolic formation,” and “rational reconstruction,” which is directed to “the intuitive [or pretheoretical] knowledge [or fore-knowledge] of competent subjects” (Holub: 11 f.)

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