

CHAPTER 10

CRITIQUES IN POLICY DEBATE

Some policy debaters are experimenting with new argument forms, seeking to reject traditional models such as stock issues or the policymaking. The *kritik* (a German term for *critique*) attempts to use various forms of postmodern philosophy to expose destructive assumptions made by the opposing team. This chapter explains these new challenges to the traditional approaches in policy debate and presents strategies for defeating them.

By the time you reach the end of this chapter, you will, perhaps, discern that I am not a fan of critiques or other argumentative techniques for undermining the policymaking focus of policy debate.

WHAT IS THE CRITIQUE?

The critique means something quite specific. The *critique* (critical theory) got its name from German philosophers associated with the Frankfurt School, which explains why it is sometimes identified by the German word *kritik*. The Frankfurt School philosophers (Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Jurgen Habermas, and others) shared an association with the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany. All the Frankfurt School philosophers were advocates of Karl Marx's theory of historical determinism. This theory held that the excesses of capitalism will inevitably lead to its collapse, allowing labor—the only ultimate value—to result in the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie. Thus, the future of the world will feature an inevitable replacement of capitalism with communism. The Frankfurt School toiled, however, with the question of why the communist transition, if inevitable, seems to be so slow in coming. One common answer is that capitalist power persists because it has succeeded in masking its oppressive power. Capitalists mask their evil intentions by using progressive symbols, deceiving the workers into continuing to accept their chains.

Consider some U.S.-based examples of masking. Marxists believed that the Great Depression of the 1930s was capitalism's last gasp—it should have represented the death knell of capitalism. Yet Franklin Delano Roosevelt, with his seemingly progressive moves, masked the evils of capitalism by providing temporary jobs through the Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps. The creation of the Social Security system further pacified the masses. Keep in mind that Marxists have