

Government 352 Critical Theory

Professor Ernesto Verdeja

“The splinter in your eye is the best magnifying-glass.”

Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

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In the early twentieth century, a group of intellectuals broadly known as the Frankfurt School sought to move beyond standard class-based (i.e. Marxist) approaches in social analysis to investigate the unique challenges posed by capitalism, modern bureaucracy and mass politics. Against the backdrop of Nazism, Stalinism and monopoly capitalism, the Frankfurt School asked two questions: How did we get here? and Where does emancipation lie? Influenced by Hegel, Marx, Weber, Nietzsche and Freud, they drew from a wide array of intellectual disciplines and theoretical approaches in an effort to diagnose the ruined, pathological world of modernity. Their studies - which go under the general name of "Critical Theory" - were among the first which can be properly labeled interdisciplinary, encompassing insights from numerous intellectual approaches. By the time of their mature works the Frankfurt School no longer referred to their work as philosophy, politics, sociology, aesthetics or psychology; it was, simply, "Theory." We will read the works of Georg Lukács, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas, among others. The course will consider the strengths and limitations of Critical Theory through close readings of the school's seminal texts.

Course Expectations and Requirements:

This is a lecture-discussion class. Class sessions will be devoted mainly to discussion of the arguments from the texts we will be studying. IT IS THEREFORE ESSENTIAL THAT READINGS BE COMPLETED BEFORE CLASS. It is not enough just to read the texts passively; you should come to class prepared to state and explain the central concepts, the main theses, and the core structure of the argument for the assigned reading for each class.

In addition to doing the assigned readings on time and participating in class discussions, students will be expected to write three 6-8 page papers. I will provide topics in advance. The papers will be due on March 3, April 7, and May 15. Note that the papers are due on Fridays, not class days. They should be placed in the Govt 352 lock-box in the Government Department (1st floor, PAC) no later than noon. Late papers will be marked down one letter grade per day unless an extension has been arranged *before* the paper is due. Each paper is worth 30% of your grade, and participation is 10%.

Some points regarding your papers:

1. Establish a focus. A good paper has a thesis, a central idea or claim that it is making, and it presents an argument supporting that thesis. You should be able to make an outline of your paper, which will at the same time be the skeleton of the argument you are making. It is often helpful to write out the outline – in sentence form, not simply as a list of topics – before writing the paper or, at least, the final draft. A good way to think about your paper is ask yourself, “What do I want my readers to believe after they have read my paper? What reasons can I offer them to think that?” If you can answer these questions succinctly, you’re off to an excellent start.
2. Title. The title should express the main idea or focus of your paper, preparing your reader to see immediately what you’re going to say, and why it’s interesting.
3. Structure and organization. The paper should have a clear structure, with an introduction presenting the central question or problem you are addressing, a body that sets out a logical development of the reasons and evidence you are offering, and a conclusion that ties the paper together. In longer papers it is often useful to provide section headings. The introduction should generally state your main thesis, and provide an overview of the structure of the argument, to make it easier for your reader to follow it.

Some specific points:

1. Please NUMBER your pages.
2. All quotations, paraphrases, and direct use of another's ideas (even if not quoted) MUST BE cited. Using parenthetical references [author’s last name, year, page number; eg. (Adorno 1960: 45)] with a bibliography is fine; you do not have to use footnotes or endnotes. Footnotes can be used to present additional ideas, qualifications, or other points

that would detract from the flow of the paper.

3. If you use secondary sources, make sure they are scholarly and reliable. Avoid web reference sites like Wikipedia and answers.com – these are often misleading, simplistic or just wrong.

4. Avoid common but egregious errors such as misuse of too, to or two; there, they're, or their; its or it's; affect or effect.

5. Stamp out sexism. If you mean men and women or he and she, say so. Don't assume that "man" or "men" refer to human beings generally. There are lots of ways of writing that avoid the awkwardness of, e.g., saying he or she over and over again. For help, you might consult Williams (see #6) or a more specialized guide such as *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing* by Miller and Smith.

6. There are a number of excellent guides for good writing. Strunk and White *The Elements of Style* is a classic, especially for grammar and word usage; it also offers a useful set of “principles of composition.” I especially recommend Joseph Williams, *Style: Toward Grace and Clarity*. His work is particularly helpful in offering examples of how awkward passages can be rewritten, using rules or principles that are fairly concrete and address specific issues such as clarity, cohesion, emphasis, etc. (these are all chapter headings in his book).

Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, offers a helpful discussion of how to develop (and express) an argument in a tight, logical way.

No incompletes will be given for this class.

Books:

1. *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* Andrew Arato, Eike Gebhardt (eds.) (Continuum International Publishing Group 1982)

2. *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader* Douglas MacKay Kellner, Stephen Eric Bronner (Routledge 1989)

3. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, ed. G. S. Noerr, trans. E. Jephcott (Stanford University Press 2002)

4. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* Georg Lukács (MIT Press 1972)
5. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* Herbert Marcuse (Beacon Press 1991)
6. *An Essay on Liberation* Herbert Marcuse (Beacon Press 1971)
7. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* Jürgen Habermas (MIT 1996)
8. *Illuminations* Walter Benjamin (Schocken 1969)
9. *The Communist Manifesto* Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels (Signet Classics 1998)

Recommended:

10. *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950* Martin Jay (University of California Press 1996)

Additional general references available in the library include:

- Rolf Wiggershaus *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance* (MIT 1995)
- David Held *Introduction to Critical Theory* (University of California 1980)
- Douglas Kellner *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity* (The Johns Hopkins University Press 1989)

Assignments:

1. The following abbreviations are used in the syllabus:

FSR: *Frankfurt School Reader*, edited by Andrew Arato, Eike Gebhardt

CTS: *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, edited by Douglas MacKay Kellner,
Stephen Eric Bronner.

2. All articles will be available either through Ereserve or through the electronic 'Journal Locator' database available through the library website at

<http://www.wesleyan.edu/libr/php/journallocator/jlocate.php>. I have identified which are on Ereserve and which are on the database (use JSTOR for the latter).

3. Note that in a number of weeks, I list additional texts under the heading of 'Recommended.' You may find these useful as supplemental readings to the assignments.

You can also find an annotated bibliography at the end of *CTS*.

4. All dates are subject to change.

Schedule:

Week 1

Session 1: January 25 Wed.

Introduction. No assignment.

Foundations

Week 2

Session 2: January 30 Mon.

-Marx and Engels *The Communist Manifesto*

-G. Lukács 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' in *History and Class Consciousness* pp. 83-222.

Recommended:

-S. Bronner 'Philosophical Anticipations: A Commentary on the Reification Essay of Georg Lukács' in S. Bronner *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists*

Session 3: February 1 Wed.

-Marx and Engels *The Communist Manifesto* (continued)

-G. Lukács 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' *History and Class Consciousness* (continued)

Week 3

Session 4: February 6 Mon.

-M. Horkheimer 'The State of Contemporary Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research' - *CTS*

-M. Horkheimer "Traditional and Critical Theory" (E-Reserve)

Session 5: February 8 Wed.

Horkheimer essays continued.

Economy & Politics

Week 4

Session 6: February 13 Mon.

-F. Pollock "State Capitalism" – *FSR*

Recommended:

-M. Postone 'Critique, State and Economy' in F. Rush (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*

Session 7: February 15 Wed.

-M. Horkheimer "Authoritarian State" - *FSR*

Psychoanalysis & Politics

Week 5

Session 8: February 20 Mon.

-S. Freud *Civilization and its Discontents* (selections on E-Reserve)

Session 9: February 22 Wed.

-E. Fromm "Psychoanalysis and sociology" – *CTS*

-E. Fromm "Politics and psychoanalysis" – *CTS*

-T. Adorno "Introduction to *Authoritarian Personality*" – *CTS*

Recommended:

-E. Fromm *Escape from Freedom*

Aesthetics & Politics

Week 6

Session 10: February 27 Mon.

-W. Benjamin "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" - *Illuminations*

Session 11: March 1 Wed.

-T. Adorno- "On the Fetish Character in Music and Regression in Listening" – *FSR*

Recommended:

-S. Bronner 'Rescuing the Fragments: On the Messianic Materialism of Walter Benjamin' in S. Bronner *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists*

-T. Adorno 'Commitment' – *FSR*.

March 3 Fri.

PAPER 1 DUE. Put paper in my lockbox for Govt 352, 1st floor PAC, outside Government Department, no later than noon.

Modernity and the Pathologies of Reason

Week 7

Session 12: March 6 Mon.

-T. Adorno M. Horkheimer - *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Recommended:

-J. Roberts 'The Dialectic of Enlightenment' in F. Rush (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*

-M. Horkheimer *The Eclipse of Reason*

Session 13: March 8 Wed.

Continue *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

SPRING BREAK.

Week 8

Session 14: March 27 Mon.

Continue *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Session 15: March 29 Wed.

J. Habermas 'The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno' in *New German Critique*, No. 26 (Spring Summer 1982) pp. 13-30.
Available through JSTOR.

Week9

Session 16: April 3 Mon.

-H. Marcuse *One Dimensional Man* -'Introduction to First Edition' pp. xli-xlix;
pp. 1-83; 123-199.

Session 17: April 5 Wed.

-H. Marcuse *One Dimensional Man* (continued)
-H. Marcuse *An Essay on Liberation*

Recommended:

-H. Marcuse 'Repressive Tolerance' in Wolff, R., B. Moore, H. Marcuse *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*
-D. Kellner *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*
-S. Bronner 'Utopia, Aesthetics, Revolution: Herbert Marcuse and the Radical Imagination' in S. Bronner *Of Critical Theory and its Theorists*

April 7 Fri.

PAPER 2 DUE. Put paper in my lockbox for Govt 352, 1st floor PAC, outside Government Department, no later than noon.

Habermas and the Public Sphere

Week10

Session 18: April 10 Mon.

-J. Habermas *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* pp. 27-88; 141-250.

Recommended:

-J. Sitton *Habermas and Contemporary Society*

-R. Holub *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere*

-S. White *The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas*

R. Geuss *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School*

Session 19: April 12 Wed.

-J. Habermas *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (continued)

Week 11

Session 20: April 17 Mon.

-N. Fraser 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy' in *Social Text* 25/26 (1990) pp. 56-80. Available through JSTOR.

Session 21: April 19 Wed.

-Discussion continued.

Critical Theory Reconstructed

Week 12

Session 22: April 24 Mon.

- J. Habermas "Technology and Science as Ideology" in *Toward a Rational Society* (E-Reserve)

-J. Habermas "Task of a Critical Theory of Society" – *CTS*

Session 23: April 26 Wed.

- Habermas essays continued.

Modernity & Postmodernity

Week 13

Session 24: May 1 Mon.

-JF Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (sections 1-5, available at <http://www.california.com/~rathbone/lyopmc.htm>)

Recommended:

-JF Lyotard *The Postmodern Explained*

-Steven Best and Douglas Kellner 'Ch.5 Lyotard and Postmodern Gaming' in *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*

Session 25: May 3 Wed.

-S. Benhabib 'Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-Francois Lyotard' *New German Critique*, No. 33 (Autumn 1984) pp. 103-126. Available through JSTOR.

-J. Habermas 'Modernity vs. Postmodernity' *New German Critique* No. 22 (Winter 1981) pp. 3-14. Available through JSTOR.

Recommended:

A. Honneth (et. al. eds.) *Cultural-Political Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Modernity*

Week 14

Session 26: May 8 Mon.

Final Class. No reading assignment.

May 15 Mon.

Final paper due. Put paper in my lockbox for Govt 352, 1st floor PAC, outside Government Department, no later than noon.

END.