

Government 352 Critical Theory

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“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 that 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.

Many of the readings assume familiarity with 'modern' social theory, particularly Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Weber, as well as 'contemporary' thought. While I will give background information as needed to make the material accessible and foster discussion, a background in modern or contemporary political theory (such as govt. 338 or govt. 339) is strongly recommended.

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. I expect significant student participation in this course.

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 2, April 6, and May 15. Note that the first two 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, no exceptions. Each paper is worth 30% of your grade, and participation is 10%.

Attendance and Incompletes: Students are required to attend every class. Students who miss more than two classes will have their final grade reduced by one letter grade per class missed. There are absolutely no exceptions to this rule.

No incompletes will be given for this class.

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. You may find it useful to provide section headings. The introduction should 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.

7. Reread your paper before turning it in.

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. *Civilization and Its Discontents* Sigmund Freud (Norton Reissue Edition 1989)

10. *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader* Steven Siedman (ed.) (Beacon 1985)

Recommended:

11. *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 Thu.

Introduction. No assignment.

Foundations

Week 2

Session 2: January 30 Tue.

- K. Marx “The German Ideology: Part 1” (ERES)
- F. Engels “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific” (aka, ‘Anti-Dühring’) (ERES)

Session 3: February 1 Thu.

Marx, Engels.

Week 3

Session 4: February 6 Tue.

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

Recommended:

- F. Feher “Lukács in Weimar” *Telos* 39 (1979)
- S. Bronner “Philosophical Anticipations: A Commentary on the Reification Essay of Georg Lukács” in S. Bronner *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists*
- A. Honneth “A Fragmented World: On the Implicit Relevance of Lukács’ Early Work” in *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*

Session 5: February 8 Thu.

- Lukács, continued.
- M. Horkheimer “Traditional and Critical Theory” (E-Reserve)
- M. Horkheimer “The State of Contemporary Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research” - *CTS*

Recommended:

- T. Adorno, “Subject and Object” – *FSR*
- T. McCarthy “The Idea of a Critical Theory and Its Relation to Philosophy” in S. Benhabib, et. al. (eds.) *On Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives*

Economy & Politics

Week 4

Session 6: February 13 Tue.

-F. Pollock “State Capitalism” – FSR

Recommended:

-M. Postone *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Social Theory*

Session 7: February 15 Thu.

-M. Horkheimer “Authoritarian State” - FSR

Psychoanalysis & Politics

Week 5

Session 8: February 20 Tue.

-S. Freud *Civilization and its Discontents*

Recommended:

-J. Whitebook, *Perversions and Utopia: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory*

-P. Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist*

Session 9: February 22 Thu.

-E. Fromm “Psychoanalysis and Sociology” – CTS

-E. Fromm “The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology” – FSR

-T. Adorno “Introduction to *Authoritarian Personality*” – CTS

-H. Marcuse “The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man” - CTS

Recommended:

-E. Fromm *Escape from Freedom*

-H. Marcuse *Eros and Civilization*

Aesthetics & Politics

Week 6

Session 10: February 27 Tue.

- W. Benjamin “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” - *Illuminations*
- T. Adorno “On the Fetish Character in Music and Regression in Listening” – *FSR*

Session 11: March 1 Thu.

- T. Adorno “Art, Society, Aesthetics” in *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 1-15. (Ereserve)

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*.
- J. M. Bernstein *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*
- C. Menke *The Sovereignty of Art*

March 2 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 Tue.

- T. Adorno M. Horkheimer - *Dialectic of Enlightenment* pp. 1-62; 94-136.

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 Thu.

Continue *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Recommended:

J. Habermas “The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno” in *New German Critique*, No. 26 (Spring Summer 1982)

Spring Break. Enjoy it.

Week 8

Session 14: March 27 Tue.

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

Session 15: March 29 Thu.

-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*

Habermas and the Public Sphere

Week 9

Session 16: April 3 Tue.

-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 17: April 5 Thu.

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

April 6 Fri.

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

Critical Theory Reconstructed I: Communicative Action

Week 10

Session 18: April 10 Tue.

Note: I recommend reading the introduction to S. Seidman, *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader* for this week.

Assignment:

- J. Habermas "Technology and Science as Ideology"
 - J. Habermas "The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society"
 - J. Habermas "What Does a Crisis Mean Today? Legitimation Problems in Late Capitalism"
- all in S. Seidman *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader*

Recommended:

- T. McCarthy 'Complexity and Democracy: Or, the Seductions of Systems Theory' in *New German Critique*, no. 35 (1985)
- A. Honneth 'From Adorno to Habermas: On the Transformation of Critical Social Theory' in *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*

Session 19: April 12 Thu.

Continued.

Modernity & Postmodernity

Week 11

Session 20: April 17 Tue.

-J.F. Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (sections 1-5, 9-10, 14, Appendix) (available as a photocopy)

Recommended:

-J.F. Lyotard *The Postmodern Explained*

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

Session 21: April 19 Thu.

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

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

All available on JSTOR.

Recommended:

-A. Honneth "An Aversion Against the Universal: A Commentary on Lyotard's Postmodern Condition" *Theory, Culture and Society* vol. 2, no. 3 (1985)

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

Critical Theory Reconstructed II: Neo-Kantian Liberalism

Week 12

Session 22: April 24 Tue.

-J. Habermas "Three Normative Models of Democracy" *Constellations*, vl. No. 1 (1994) pp.1-10 (available through 'Journal Locator' function on library page)

-J. Habermas "A Genealogical Analysis of the Cognitive Content of Morality" in J. Habermas *The Inclusion of the Other* (ERES)

-J. Habermas "On the Internal Relation between the Rule of Law and Democracy"

in J. Habermas *The Inclusion of the Other* (ERES)

-J. Habermas “Appendix II: Popular Sovereignty as Procedure” in J. Habermas *Between Facts and Norms* (ERES)

Recommended:

-W. Scheuerman “Between Radicalism and Resignation: Democratic Theory in Habermas’s *Between Facts and Norms*” in R. von Schomberg and K. Baynes *Discourse and Democracy: Essays on Habermas’s Between Facts and Norms*

Session 23: April 26 Thu.

-Continue.

-I. M. Young “Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy” (ERES)

-C. Mouffe “Democracy, Power and the ‘Political’” both in S. Benhabib (ed.) *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (ERES)

Recommended:

-S. Benhabib “Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy” in S. Benhabib (ed.) *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*

Redistribution or Recognition?

Week 13

Session 24: May 1 Tue.

-A. Honneth, “Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition” *Political Theory*, vol. 20, no. 2 (May 1992)

-N. Fraser “From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a Post-socialist Age” *New Left Review*, 212 (July-August 1995)

All available through ‘Journal Locator’ function on library page.

Recommended:

A. Honneth *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*

N. Fraser and A. Honneth *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*

Session 25: May 3 Thu.

- I. M. Young “Unruly Categories: A Critique of Nancy Fraser’s Dual Systems Theory”, *New Left Review* 222 (March-April 1997)
- N. Fraser “A Rejoinder to Iris Young,” *New Left Review*, 223 (May-June 1997)
- J. Butler “Merely Cultural” *New Left Review*, 227 (January-February 1998)
- N. Fraser “Heterosexism, Misrecognition and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler” *New Left Review*, 228 (March-April 1998)

All available through ‘Journal Locator’ function on library page.

Recommended:

- N. Fraser “Rethinking Recognition” *New Left Review* 3 (May-June 2000)

Week 14

Session 26: May 8 Tue.

Final Class. No reading assignment.

May 15 Tue.

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

END.