

Introduction to Critical Theory

Alice Crary

Hilary Term 2019

Core and suggested readings by weeks

Description. This introductory set of lectures is organized historically and thematically, tracing, during its first three weeks, the idea of a “critical theory of society” to its articulation in the work of successive representatives of the Frankfurt School and then following up, during the remaining five weeks, on some of the guiding philosophical questions that continue to drive the development of the tradition and account for its persistent moral and political importance. Themes to be addressed include the critique of instrumental reason, ideology critique, immanent critique, social ontology, critique of capitalism, the logic of the social sciences, and the relation between Critical Theory and analytic social philosophy.

The following is a provisional list of lecture topics: 1. Founding moments: calls for “critical” not “traditional” social theory; 2. Early phase: instrumental reason as a critical target; 3. Middle phase: commentary on some of Habermas’ early contributions; 4. Contemporary Kantian conceptions of critique; 5. Genealogy and critique; 6. Hegelian tendencies of contemporary critical theories; 7. Ideology critique as a key task for critical theories; and 8. Critique as critique of capitalism

Week 1. Founding moments: calls for “critical” not “traditional” social theory

Core readings

Max Horkheimer, “The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research” (in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*)

----- “Traditional and Critical Theory” and “Authority and the Family” (in Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Writings*)

Suggested readings

Jay Martin, *Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute for Social Research: 1923-1950*, Chapters 1, 2 and 8

Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History Theories, and Political Significance*, esp. Chapter 1

Also excerpts from Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right* and Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*

Week 2. Early phase: instrumental reason as a critical target

Core readings

Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*

J.M. Bernstein, “The Idea of Instrumental Reason” (in Honneth and Hammer, eds., *The Routledge Companion to the Frankfurt School*)

Suggested readings

Horkheimer, “The Concept of Man” and ‘Threats to Freedom” (in *Critique of Instrumental Reason*)

J.M. Bernstein, “Introduction” to Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*
Habermas, esp. on Adorno in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*

Marcuse, "Industrialization and Capitalism in the Work of Max Weber" in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*

The rest of Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason*

Honneth, "A Social Pathology of Reason: On the Intellectual Legacy of Critical Theory," Chapter 2 of *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*

Week 3. Middle phase: commentary on some of Habermas' early contributions

Core readings

Habermas, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'" in *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics*, trans. J.J. Shapiro

----- "Appendix: Knowledge and Human Interests: *A General Perspective*" (in *Knowledge and Human Interests*)

----- "Universal Pragmatics: Reflections on a Theory of Communicative Competence" (1971) (in *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction: Preliminary Studies in the Theory of Communicative Action*)

Suggested readings

Habermas, "What is Universal Pragmatics?" (in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*)

Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*

Habermas' contributions to Adorno et. al, *The Positivism Dispute in German Sociology*

Jay Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life: Jürgen Habermas and the future of Critical Theory*, Introduction and chapters 3 and 6

Theory of Communicative Action, vol.1, at least the opening

Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*

The rest of Marcuse, *The One-Dimensional Man*

Week 4. Contemporary Kantian conceptions of critique

Core readings

Habermas, "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification" (in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*)

Rainer Forst, "Universalism and Contextualism," Chapter 4 of *Contexts of Justice*

Onora O'Neill, "Starke und Schwache Gesellschaftskritik in einer Globalisierten Welt" (in *DZPhil*, vol.48, no.5 (2000): 719-728; unfortunately not available in English translation)

Suggested readings

Rainer Forst, "First Things First: Redistribution, Recognition and Justification," Chapter 5 of *Critique and Justification*

Michael Walzer, Chapters 1 and 2 of *Interpretation and Social Criticism*

Michael Walzer, "Exodus and Revolution" and Chapters 1, 5, 7 and 9 of *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century*

Week 5. Genealogy and critique

Core readings

Axel Honneth, “Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso: the Idea of Critique in the Frankfurt School,” Chapter 3 of *Pathologies of Reason*
 Amy Allen, “Critical Theory and the Idea of Progress,” Chapter 1 of *The End of Progress*

Suggested readings

Seyla Benhabib, Part I of *Critique, Norm and Utopia*
 Judith Butler, “What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue”
 Michel Foucault, “What is Critique?” (in *The Politics of Truth*, eds. Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth)
 David Owen, “Genealogy and Critical Theory” (in *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol.10, no.2, 2002)
 Martin Saar, “Genealogical Critique”
 (Perhaps: Latour, “Has Critique Run out of Steam?”)

Week 6. Hegelian tendencies of contemporary critical theories

Core readings

Honneth, *Freedom’s Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Theory*, Preface, Introduction and Chapters 3 and 6
 Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, Introduction and Chapter 1

Suggested readings

Honneth, “Rejoinder” (in *Critical Horizons*, vol.16, no.2, 2015)
 Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, Chapters 1, 2 and 3
 Honneth and Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition?*

Week 7. Ideology critique as a key task for critical theories

Core readings

Raymond Geuss, Chapters 1 and 2 of *The Idea of a Critical Theory*

Suggested readings

Karl Marx, “The German Ideology,” including “Theses on Feuerbach”
 ----- “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction”
 ----- “Fetishism of Commodities” in *Capital*, vol. 1
 Jaeggi, “Rethinking Ideology” (in de Bruin et al, *New Waves in Political Philosophy*)
 Jorge Larrain, *The Concept of Ideology*, Chapter 1

Week 8. Critique as critique of capitalism

Core readings

Herbert Marcuse, *The One-Dimensional Man*, “Introduction” and Chapters 1, 5 and 6
 Feenberg, A. (1988) “The Bias of Technology,” in *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*
 Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*, Chapters 1, 4 and Epilogue

Suggested readings

Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Capitalism*