

Department of Philosophy
The Colorado College
Spring 2005 - Block 5

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Philosophy 303

ADVANCED TOPICS IN PHILOSOPHY: CRITICAL THEORY

307 Tutt Library

Course Description

This course will investigate the school of radical interdisciplinary social philosophy that developed when German scholars hostile to fascism combined Marxian philosophy with Freudian psychoanalysis in an effort to understand, in part, the promise and dangers of mass market democratic orders. The course will provide an advanced survey of the German origins and development of critical theory, as well as an introduction to competing modernist and postmodernist versions of critical theory that have developed in German, French, and Anglo-American circles in recent decades.

The term will begin with a brief overview of works that inspired critical theory, including selections from Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Weber, as well as Freud's short book, *The Future of an Illusion*. The second part of the course will focus three founding texts of critical theory: Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of modern positivism, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*; Fromm's investigation of individual psychology and philosophical values, *Man for Himself*; and Marcuse's attack on mass culture, *One-Dimensional Man*. Next the course will compare competing contemporary versions of critical theory, Habermas' modernist philosophy of democratic communication and Foucault's and Lyotard's postmodernist interrogations of power. The block will close with readings students choose from among the variety of contemporary forms of critical theory, including works skeptical about critical theory. These contemporary works may include works of philosophy, as well as philosophic inquiries related to the social sciences and psychology; feminism and queer theory; media and mass culture; liberation theology; and radical pedagogy, among other topics.

Course Goals

The primary aim of the course will be to give students an intensive introduction to one of the most influential schools of radical philosophic thought in recent decades. However, since it is characteristic of critical theory to engage the problems of the age, the course is not intended simply as an overview of a body of academic scholarship. From its origin at the Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt University, critical theorists have embraced three interrelated aims: gaining a comprehensive overview of the development, problems, and potentials of modern societies through interdisciplinary inquiry; identifying forms of thought and action that obstruct human flourishing; and finding ways to encourage progressive change, if possible, or bolster continued opposition to oppressive practices and beliefs. The course consequently will aim to explore ways in which philosophy can connect with other forms of thought and action in order to help students gain perspective on the contemporary age. By connecting philosophy to other disciplines, the course will seek to see whether or to what extent the perspective of critical theory can help one to identify forms of oppression and practices of emancipation in what, in most important and apparent respects, is a free and liberal society.

The course will also seek to develop students' abilities to read, interpret, and respond to complex texts. Refining and developing interpretations of the texts we read will be emphasized through a number of brief writing assignments, combined with discussion and presentations in class. A short paper after the first week will give students a quick introduction to some of basic notions of critical thought, while one longer paper, due at the end of the block, will allow students to develop and defend their own judgments about critical theory and its applicability to problems or literatures that interest them.

Course Requirements

Reading. This course will have a demanding yet provocative reading list. Students will be expected to keep up with the reading throughout the block. Plan to spend a fair amount of time reading *before* attending class and, at times, re-reading after class. In general, texts are to be brought to our meetings so that they may be referred to in our discussions.

Course Meetings and Discussion. Most course meetings will consist largely of discussion, with very limited lecturing from time to time. Individual students may be assigned to lead discussions, take part in debates on particular topics, or

make presentations periodically. Students should expect to attend class meetings consistently and punctually; and to discuss the subjects and texts under investigation in a civil manner. Performance in discussions will strongly influence the participation grade.

Writing and Examinations. Students will write six two-page reaction papers, one short essay (4-6 pages), and one longer term paper (10-15 pages). The two papers are to be typed (i.e., word-processed), double-spaced, and annotated in accordance with accepted norms of scholarship (that is, with citations and notes). Unexcused late papers will be downgraded one step per hour tardy. In general, papers will be collected and returned in digital form via e-mail.

Required Texts

Sigmund Freud, *Future of an Illusion*, ed. James Stachey, W.W. Norton, 1927, 1976.
 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford University Press, 1944, 2002.
 Eric Fromm, *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics*, Henry Holt, 1947, 1990.
 Herbert Marcuse *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Beacon Press, 1964, 1991.
 Jürgen Habermas, *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader*, ed. Steven Seidman, Beacon Press, 1990.
 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

Additional Readings

Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" (1784), in *Internet Source Book*, ed. Paul Halsall, [<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/kant-what-is.html>], (August 1997)
 G.W.F. Hegel, selections from *Philosophy of History*, in *Marxists.org Internet Archive*, trans. J. Sibree, [<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/hisindex.htm>]
 Karl Marx, "Theses on Feurbach" and selections from *The German Ideology*, in *Marxists.org Internet Archive* [<http://www.marxists.org/index.htm>]
 Marx Weber, "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation," *The Dead Sociologists Index* [[http://www2.pfeiffer.edu/~lridener/DSS/INDEX.HTML - weber](http://www2.pfeiffer.edu/~lridener/DSS/INDEX.HTML-weber)]

Readings for the last week or so of the course will be chosen by students. Other supplemental readings may also be assigned as electronic reserves. A few additional shorter readings appear on the syllabus below.

Grading and Attendance Policies

Grades will be assigned on an 100-point scale and weighted in the following manner:

1. First paper (4-6 pages)	Tues., 1Feb.	20% (2% of which is for draft)
2. Second paper (10-15 pages)	Wed., 16 Jan.	55%
3. Six reaction papers (2 pages each)	Various dates	12%
4. Participation		<u>13%</u>
TOTAL:		100%

The two-page reaction papers will be graded minimally: plus, check, minus. For detail on this requirement, see p. 5 of this syllabus. The schedule of assignments appears above and below. You will be expected to meet all of these deadlines. Exceptions will be made only in extreme and unavoidable circumstances. If you expect to submit a paper late, contact me immediately. Either see me in my office, or give me a note or an e-mail message explaining your circumstances. If religious observances or other serious obligations conflict with the course schedule, let me know as soon as possible, and we can work out an alternate schedule for you.

Regular, timely attendance and active participation in discussion are essential parts of the course. Unexcused absences and regular tardiness will be noted and will affect grades negatively. If you have a good reason to be absent or late, notify me as soon as possible. Be sure to write a note (so that I remember!) as well as speak to me. Plan to attend class for the whole period, focusing on coursework throughout. If you have a good reason for arriving late or leaving early, please notify me in advance in writing (e-mail is best). If you cannot notify me in advance, do so as soon as you can afterwards. **As a courtesy to all, please turn off pagers and telephones while in class.** Note that this entire syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

Office Hours/Communication

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30-3 p.m. I am also generally in my office (132 Armstrong) afternoons. See me after class or call or e-mail me to make an appointment outside of office hours.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS, TOPICS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Note: All assignments are to be completed *before* class.
Class will meet from 9:20 a.m. to 11:45 a.m., with a 15-minute break
* Indicates electronic reserve reading.

I. Week 1 : Origins of Critical Theory

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| Monday, 24 January | <u>Introduction – Critical Theory and Democratic Life</u>
Reading: Begin reading Kant and Hegel as soon as possible! |
| Tuesday, 25 January | <u>Enlightenment, Freedom, and Rationalist Philosophy</u>
a. *Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?” (4-page pdf)
b. *Hegel, selections from <i>Philosophy of History</i> . pp. 1-26. |
| Wednesday, 26 January | <u>Marx’s Critique of Philosophy and Modern Freedom</u>
a. *Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach” (3-page pdf) and selections from <i>The German Ideology</i> , pp. 1-17.
b. *Marx, <i>On the Jewish Question</i> , pp. 1-17. |
| Thursday, 27 January | <u>Freud’s Critique of Religious and the Neurosis of Civilization</u>
a. Freud, <i>The Future of an Illusion</i> , sections I-VI.
b. Freud, <i>The Future of an Illusion</i> , sections VII-X. |
| Friday, 28 January | <u>Weber and Horkheimer on Values and Modern Rational States</u>
a. *Weber, “Science as a Vocation” (16-page pdf) and “Politics as a Vocation” (29-page pdf).
b. *Horkheimer, “The State of Contemporary Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research,” in <i>Critical Theory and Society: A Reader</i> , eds. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner (Routledge, 1989), pp. 29-36. |

II. Weeks 2-3: Founding Text of Critical Theory

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| Monday, 31 January | <u>Modern Ideals and Twentieth-Century Barbarism</u>
a. Horkheimer & Adorno, <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i> , pp. 1-62.
b. Horkheimer & Adorno, pp. 63-93.
<i>Draft of First Paper Due – 5 p.m. (value: 2% of grade)</i> |
| Tuesday, 1 February | <u>Deceptive Freedoms?</u>
a. Horkheimer & Adorno, pp. 94-136.
b. Horkheimer & Adorno, pp. 137-172,
Recommended: “Notes and Sketches.”
<i>First Paper Due – 5 p.m. (value: 18% of grade)</i> |
| Wednesday, 2 February | <u>Critical Ethics, Psychoanalysis, and the Modern Character</u>
a. Fromm, <i>Man for Himself</i> , pp. 3-49.
b. Fromm, pp. 50-117. |

- Thursday, 3 February Pleasures and Beliefs in a Materialist Age
 a. Fromm, pp. 118-196.
 b. Fromm, pp. 197-250.
- Friday, 4 February The Emptiness of Consumer Society
 a. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp. ix-55.
 b. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp. 56-120.
- Monday, 7 February The Decline of Thought
 a. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp. 120-199.
 b. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp. 203-257.

II. Weeks 3-4: Contemporary Critical Theory

- Tuesday, 8 February Rethinking Critical Theory
 a. Habermas, *Habermas on Society & Politics*, pp. 1-25, 47-54.
 b. Habermas, pp. 77-103, 142-164...
- Wednesday, 9 February Contemporary Challenges
 a. Habermas, pp. 165-228.
 b. Habermas, pp. 237-265, 230-236
- Thursday, 10 February The Postmodern Debate
 a. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in David Ingram and Julia Simon-Ingram, *Critical Theory: The Essential Readings*, pp. 303-319.
 b. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, pp. xxiii-84.
- Friday, 11 February Modernity and Beyond
 a. Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," in Ingram, pp. 342-356.
 b. Student readings and reports.
- Monday, 14 February Student Reports
 More student readings and reports.
- Tuesday, 15 February Student Reports
 More student readings and reports.
- Wednesday, 16 February **Final Paper Due**

Two-Page Summary And Reaction Statements

Over the course of the term, students will write at least six short, informal summary-and-reaction statements. These pieces should:

- a) state in summary form what strikes you as the most significant or interesting point (or two points) made in the assigned text or texts; and
- b) explain your reaction to that aspect of the reading.

These statements should be the equivalent of 1 ½ - 2 word-processed, double-spaced pages – so about 375-525 words long. The format is informal: your statement should list your name, the date, the assignment (the authors, titles, and chapters/pages discussed), and your own title at the top. You should divide the statement into two parts, one summarizing the reading's most important point or points and the other giving your reaction to the reading. You need neither quote nor cite the text, though you can, if you think it important to do so. The statements should be written in clear, Standard English prose. The style may be informal.

As you write, don't try to summarize *all* the points made in the reading. Focus on one or points (or, at most, three) that seems highly significant *to you*. This point or these points ought to have led you to think about something that seems important, significant, or meaningful. This point or these points need not be central to the reading, although in most cases I expect they will be. You may well write about some minor aside that the authors make, if that aside has led you to begin thinking. Just be sure to explain clearly and accurately what the authors say when you say the authors say something. Also, explain your reaction, your interest, your thought process. When I say, "explain," I don't mean saying that something is "interesting" or it has "made you think." Instead, identify what *in particular* strikes you as interesting, or what specific problems or ideas the reading raised for you, and then give the reader some sense of why any of these ideas seem important or significant to you. What has led you to react in the way you have?

This assignment is meant to be focused both on the reading and on your thoughts insofar as they relate to the readings. For the second half of the papers, you may explain why the authors' claims seem to you wrong-headed, or really cogent; why they excite or repel you; why they have made you think of something in a new way, or why they seem to point to a dead end. You may explain why the piece seems really bad or really good to you. This assignment lets you think aloud, as it were. However, the first part of the paper should accurately summarize what the author says.

The assignment also, I hope, will further four other aims. First, it will give you a chance to work on mastering the readings, as well as to demonstrate to me that you have done the reading. If there are parts of the readings that you don't understand, then write about the problems you have in seeing the author's points. I'll try to address those problems, either directly, by commenting on your paper, or indirectly, in class. Second, these assignments are designed to give you some easy practice in writing clearly and coherently. The more you learn to clarify your thoughts on paper, the better off you will be as a writer and student. Third, your comments may provide food for thought for you and your fellow students in class discussion and when you prepare to write exam essays.

These papers will be graded minimally: plus, check, minus. At most, I will add only a few comments.

- Plus: a) the paper clearly and coherently develops an idea; b) it also accurately and fully summarizes what the readings say; and c) it convincingly and clearly shows why this point or line of thought is significant to you.
- Check: the paper is a serious effort that contains a reasonably accurate summary and a serious reaction.
- Minus: the paper is just thrown together, it lacks careful thought, or it is inaccurate about the reading,

Pluses will earn extra credit (**2.5%**), with checks gaining full credit (**2%**), check/minus partial (**1.5%**), and minuses partial (**1%**) or **zero** credit. I will give pluses rarely. A check is the equivalent of an "A+" already for 2% of your final grade.

There are 11 authors assigned in this course. You must write reaction papers on six of them., but you may write on additional authors – in which case only the six best grades will be counted for the final grade. No late papers will be accepted.

Note: Reaction papers must come from across the term. There must be *two* from each of the three parts of the course:

- I. Kant, Hegel, Marx, Weber II. Horheimer/Adorno, Fromm, Marcuse. III. Habermas, Foucault, Lyotard