

Department of Philosophy
The Colorado College
Fall 2011 - Block 3

Dennis McEnnerney
Office: 124 Armstrong Hall
Phone: 389-6564; E-mail:
dmcennerney@coloradocollege.edu

Philosophy 342

CRITICAL THEORY

Draft – 11 August 2011 – Subject to Revision

Course Description

This course will investigate various forms of critical theory, beginning with the school of radical interdisciplinary social philosophy, often called “Critical Theory” or “the Frankfurt School,” which was and remains an assemblage of scholars whose works combine Marxian philosophy with Freudian psychoanalysis in an effort to understand better the promise and dangers of mass societies, including ostensibly free democratic ones. After examining the German origins and development of this form of critical theory, which centered on the recovery of human autonomy, the course will survey two linguistically-inflected approaches to updating critical theory in response to the challenges of turn-of-the-century Western societies: a revisionist, largely German form of Frankfurt School philosophy; and post-structuralist, largely French approaches to critique. Finally, the course will examine some alternatives to and questions about these differing approaches.

The authors examined during the first three-quarters of the term will include many of the most influential radical thinkers in the continental tradition of social and political philosophy. The term will begin with a brief consideration of Freud’s view of science, and then turn to two texts central to the original project of the Frankfurt School: Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s critique of modern positivism, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*; and Marcuse’s investigation of Freud, repression, and liberation, *Eros and Civilization*. Next the course will compare competing contemporary versions of critical theory: Habermas’ modernist philosophy of democratic communication, Foucault’s poststructuralist interrogation of power, and Lyotard’s postmodern investigation of language. All students will be responsible for mastery of the works in the first three parts of the course.

The block will end with an examination of some alternatives to or questions about critical theory, focusing on debates or problems concerning radical democracy, gender and identity, modernism-postmodernism, and technology and romanticism. In this last section of the course, students will be placed into groups, each of which will be responsible for reporting on the reading to the rest of the class. On days when students are not responsible for reporting on course readings, they will be free to work on their final projects (though they may have to write reaction papers on the reading).

Course Goals

The primary aim of the course will be to introduce several influential schools of recent radical political-philosophic thought. 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 or at least bolster opposition to oppressive practices and beliefs. The course consequently will aim to explore ways in which philosophy, combined with other forms of inquiry, can address some key problems of the current age (doubts about democracy, problems of identity, questions about the meaning of modern life, problems of technology and freedom).

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. A longer final paper will address two large aims: first, weighing the relative merits of the German/modernist and French/poststructuralist approaches to critique; and second, addressing one of the four large areas of contemporary concern explored in the last part of the course.

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. If possible, student should use the assigned editions.

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. At the end of the course, students will be assigned to one of four groups, each of which lead one day of class. Throughout the term, 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 five 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 the *University of Chicago Manual of Style*. Unexcused late papers will be downgraded one step per hour tardy. Papers will be due in digital form on a course PROWL site.

Required Texts

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Stanford University Press, 1944, 2002. ISBN: 9780804736336

Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, Beacon Press, 1955, 1992. ISBN: 9780807015551.

Jürgen Habermas, *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader*, ed. Steven Seidman, Beacon Press, 1990. Selections first published in German in the 1970s and 80s. ISBN: 9780807020012.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley, Vintage/Random House, 1990. First published in French in 1976. ISBN: 9780679724698.

Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1984. First published in French in 1979. ISBN: 9780816611737.

Required PROWL Readings

Sigmund Freud, "Lecture XXXV: The Question of a *Weltanschauung*" (excerpts) in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay, W.W. Norton, 1989, pp. 783-796. First published in German in 1933.

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, Schocken Books, 1968. First published in German in 1936.

Max Horkheimer, "The State of Contemporary Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research," in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, eds. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner, Routledge, 1989. Lecture first delivered in German in 1936.

Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," in Robert Raul Wolff, Barrington Moore, Jr., and Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, Beacon Press, 1965, pp. 81-117.

Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes toward an Investigation," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Monthly Review Press, 1971, pp. 127-186. First published in French in 1970.

Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (Summer, 1982): 777-795.

Cornelius Castoriadis, selections from *The Castoriadis Reader*, Blackwell Publishers, 1997. Essays first published in French, 1975-1994.

Nancy Fraser, "What's Critical about Critical Theory: The Case of Habermas and Gender," in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, pp. 113-143.

Craig Calhoun, "The Politics of Identity and Recognition," in *Critical Social Theory: Culture, History, and the Challenge of Difference*, Blackwell Publishers, 1995, pp. 193-230.

Alex Honneth, "Foucault and Adorno: Two Forms of the Critique of Modernity," in *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. Charles W. Wright, SUNY Press, 1995, pp. 121-131. First published in German in 1986.

Alex Honneth, "Decentered Autonomy: The Subject after the Fall," in *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, Polity Press, 2007. First published in German in 1993.

Simon Thompson, "The Agony and the Ecstasy: Foucault, Habermas, and the Problem of Recognition," in *Foucault contra Habermas: Recasting the Dialogue between Genealogy and Critical Theory*, eds. Samantha Ashenden and David Owen, Sage Publications, 1999.

Nikolas Kompridis, "Technology's Challenge to Democracy: What of the Human?" *Parrhesia* 8 (2009): 20-33.

Nikolas Kompridis, "The Idea of a New Beginning: A Romantic Source of Normativity and Freedom," in

Philosophical Romanticism, ed. Nikolas Kompridis, Routledge 2006.

Additional Suggested Readings on PROWL

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).
 Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Michael J. O'Connell, Continuum Publishing, 1972. First published in German in 1937.
 Raymond Guess, "Critical Theory," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. Craig, 1998.

Over the course of the term, other suggested readings will be added to the PROWL site, which may be found at:

<https://prowl.coloradocollege.edu/course/view.php?id=2371>

Grading and Attendance Policies

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

1. First paper draft and workshop	Mon., 8 November	2%
2. First paper (4-6 pages)	Tues., 8 November	20%
3. Group presentation	Last 5 class sessions	5%
4. Final paper proposal (1½ - 2 pages)	Fri., 11 November	2%
5. Final paper project (10-15 pages)	Wed., 21 November	41%
6. Five reaction papers (2 pages each)	Various dates	10%
7. Participation		<u>20%</u>
TOTAL:		100%

The reaction papers and the final paper proposal will be graded minimally: check, minus, zero. For more detail on the reaction paper requirement, see the last page of this syllabus.

Regular, timely attendance and active participation in discussion are essential parts of the course – worth 25% of your final grade. 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 to speak to me.

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.

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. ***As a courtesy to all, please turn off all electric devices while in class, except notebook computers or digital readers that you plan to use in class. If you use a computer or reader in class, please do not surf the web in and please do try to make eye contact with the rest of the class periodically.***

Honor Code

Students will be expected to abide by the Honor Code. Among other things, the Honor Code specifies that you will be responsible for producing all of your own work and that you will always cite the works or ideas of others used in your work. However, discussing your ideas and your writing with others is not a violation of the Honor Code. In fact, it is a good idea to compare your ideas and writings with those of others and to ask others for criticisms of your work. Using other people's ideas can also be a good idea – if their ideas are good and you credit the authors for developing the ideas.

Disability Accommodations

If you believe you are eligible for learning accommodations as the result of a qualified disability, please contact me privately. If you believe you may have a disability that impacts learning, and you have not

self-identified to the College's Disabilities Services Office, please do so immediately. I will make appropriate learning accommodations in accordance with the Disabilities Service Office's instructions. You will find their office in the Colket Student Learning Center at 152 Tutt Library. You may also contact the College's learning consultant, Jan Edwards, at the Learning Center, at 227-8285, or by visiting this site:

<http://www.coloradocollege.edu/learningcommons/academicsupport/disability.asp>

Office Hours/Communication

I will hold office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:30-3 p.m. I am also generally in my office (124 Armstrong) in the afternoon. The easiest way to meet with me would be to make an appointment after class, or contact me via e-mail (dmcennerney@coloradocollege.edu). I can also be reached at my office phone (extension 6564).

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, unless indicated otherwise.

*Indicates digital PROWL reading.

I. Origins of Critical Theory: The Recovery of Autonomous Creativity

Mon., 31 October	<p><u>Introduction – Freud on Science, Religion, Anarchism, and Marx</u></p> <p>a. 9-9:45 AM: Introductions, followed by a reading break.</p> <p>b. 11AM: discussion of Freud, “The Question of a Weltanschauung,” in <i>The Freud Reader</i>, pp. 783-796.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Suggested Background Reading:</i> *Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?” pp. 1-4.</p>	
Tues., 1 November	<p><u>A Beginning – The Frankfurt School’s Critique of Positivism</u></p> <p>a. *Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” pp. 1-15.</p> <p>b. *Max 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.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Suggested Background Readings:</i> Max Horkheimer, “Traditional and *Critical Theory,” in Horkheimer, <i>Critical Theory</i>, pp. 188-243. Raymond Geuss, “Critical Theory,” in <i>Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i>, ed. E. Craig, pp. 1-7.</p>	Group 1
Wed., 2 November	<p><u>Domination and the Western Ideal of Enlightenment</u></p> <p>a. Horkheimer/Adorno, <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i>, pp. 1-62.</p> <p>b. Horkheimer/Adorno, <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i>, pp. 63-93.</p>	Group 2
Thurs., 3 November	<p><u>Deceptive Character of Instrumental Reason</u></p> <p>a. Horkheimer/Adorno, <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i>, pp. 94-136.</p> <p>b. Horkheimer/Adorno, <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i>, pp. 137-172.</p>	Group 3
Fri, 4 November	<p><u>The Psychoanalysis of Repression</u></p> <p>a. Marcuse, <i>Eros and Civilization</i>, pp. 3-8 and summary of pp. 11-77.</p> <p>b. Marcuse, <i>Eros and Civilization</i>, pp. 79-139.</p>	Group 1
Mon., 7 November *CLASS MEETS IN* *MANITOU SPRINGS* *9:30 AM – 3:30 PM*	<p><u>Desublimation: Liberating or Repressive?</u></p> <p>a. Marcuse, <i>Eros and Civilization</i>, pp. 140-171, 197-237.</p> <p>b. *Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” pp. 81-117.</p> <p>FIRST PAPER DRAFT DUE IN CLASS <i>Afternoon: Writing Workshops, 1-3:30 PM</i></p>	Group 2
Tues., 8 November	<p><u>Writing Day</u> FIRST PAPER DUE – 3:30 PM ON PROWL</p>	

***II. The Linguistic Turn and the Critique of the Subject:
Communicative and Post-Structuralist Approaches***

Wed., 9 November	<p><u>Rethinking Critical Theory as Undistorted Communication</u></p> <p>a. Habermas, <i>Habermas on Society & Politics</i>, pp. 1-25, 77-103.</p>	Group 3
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	b. Habermas, pp. 142-187.	
Thurs., 10 November	<u>The Limits of Public Protest against the Ideology of Technology</u> a. Habermas, pp. 189-228. b. Habermas, pp. 230-265.	Group 1
Fri, 11 November	<u>Reading Day</u> a. Read for Monday – it will be a long discussion. b. Write your paper proposal.	
FINAL PAPER PROPOSALS DUE – 5 PM ON PROWL		
Mon., 14 November	<u>French Critique: Constructing Subjectivity/Deconstructing Repression</u> a. *Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in <i>Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays</i> , pp. 127-186. b. Michel Foucault, <i>History of Sexuality</i> , pp. 3-49.	Group 2
	<u>Rethinking Modernity: Discourse, Normalization, and Power</u> a. Foucault, <i>History of Sexuality</i> , pp. 53-73. b. Foucault, <i>History of Sexuality</i> , pp. 77-131.	Group 3
Tues., 15 November	<u>Beyond Liberation: Only Strategies of Resistance?</u> a. Foucault, <i>History of Sexuality</i> , pp. 135-159. b. Foucault, "The Subject and Power," pp. 777-795.	Group 1
Wed., 16 November	<u>Postmodern Performance: The Play of Language</u> a. Jean-François Lyotard, <i>The Postmodern Condition</i> , pp. 3-53. b. Jean-François Lyotard, <i>The Postmodern Condition</i> , pp. 53-82.	Group 2
III. Student Reports on Alternatives and Questions		
Thurs., 17 November	<u>An Ancient Critique: Imagining Autonomy as Democratic Project</u> a. *Castoriadis, <i>The Castoriadis Reader</i> , pp. 196-217, 267-289. b. *Castoriadis, <i>The Castoriadis Reader</i> , pp. 319-337, 338-348.	Group 3
Fri, 18 November	<u>Questioning Modern Critique: Challenges of Gender and Identity</u> a. *Nancy Fraser, "What's Critical about Critical Theory: The Case of Habermas and Gender," pp. 113-143. b. *Craig Calhoun, "The Politics of Identity and Recognition," pp. 193-230.	Group 1
Mon., 19 November	<u>Questioning Postmodern Critique: Bridges to Critical Modernism?</u> a. *Honneth, "Foucault and Adorno" pp. 121-131; and "Decentered Autonomy," pp. 181-193. b. *Thompson, "The Agony and the Ecstasy: Foucault, Habermas, and the Problem of Recognition," pp. 193-211.	Group 2
Tues., 20 November	<u>Questioning Human Being: A Critical Future via a Romantic Past</u> a. *Kompridis, "Technology's Challenge to Democracy: What of the Human?" pp. 20-33. b. *Kompridis, "The Idea of a New Beginning: A Romantic Source of Normativity and Freedom," pp. 32-59.	Group 3
Wed., 21 November	<u>Writing Day</u> FINAL PAPER DUE – NOON ON PROWL	

Two-Page Summary and Reaction Papers

Over the course of the two blocks, students will write at least five short, informal summary-and-reaction papers. Students will sign up for a group (1-3), and write about every third day. These pieces should be divided into two parts:

- a) Summary: stating what strikes you as the most significant or interesting point (or two points) made in the assigned text or texts ($\frac{1}{2}$ – 1 page); and
- b) Reaction: explaining what that aspect of the reading leads you to think about (1 – 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ pages).

These statements should be the equivalent of $1\frac{1}{2}$ - 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 (“Summary” and “Reaction”), 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 two points that seem 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 an author makes, if that aside has led you to begin thinking. Just be sure to **explain clearly and accurately what the authors say** when you claim the authors argue 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 focus 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 material our class discussions, as well as for you when you prepare to write more formal essays.

These papers will be graded minimally: check, check/minus, minus, zero. I may add no or only a few comments.

- Check: 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/minus: the paper demonstrates some effort, but it is incomplete or unbalanced.
- Minus: the paper is just thrown together, it lacks careful thought, or it is notably inaccurate about the reading,

Checks will earn full credit (**1%**), check/minuses partial credit (**0.75%**) and minuses (**0.5%**) minimal credit. A check is the equivalent of an “A+” already for 1% of your final grade.

There are 38 authors assigned in this course. You must write reaction papers on twelve of them, but you may write on additional authors — in which case only the twelve best grades will be counted for the final grade. *No late papers will be accepted.* Finally, all posted on PROWL for the entire class to view.